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MARLO, THE RENEGADE.



THE NEXT INSTANT THERE CAME A SHARP TWANG, AND FUENTES WAS JERKED VIOLENTLY FROM THE SADDLE.

Marlo, the Renegade;

OR,

THE SCAPEGRACE OF THE COAST.

A ROMANCE OF THE COWBOY
SMUGGLER'S LAST CRUISE.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTLAW AND HIS CAPTIVE.

On the bold and rugged coast of California can be seen to-day the ruins of an old Spanish mission, built upon the spur of a range of hills ending abruptly near the sea, and having the appearance of a castle of olden times.

The chapel of the mission stood on the very edge of a cliff, and was strongly built, though it had begun to crumble with time.

A wing on each side of the chapel, a court, or plaza beyond, with a two-story structure opening upon it, and the outer side overhanging the cliffs, completed the old mission, save a wall, high and thick, with a gateway leading out upon the ridge, the only seeming way to get to the isolated old place.

The wall had crumbled, the gateway had fallen, the rooms and corridors were roofless, and the chapel alone was in any kind of repair.

That any one would find there a home, unless it was a man hunted for some crime, or a hermit seeking to avoid his fellows, one would never believe.

Yet in this ruin was one whom no one would dream of finding there.

Standing at a window, seemingly opening into the chapel at the cliff end, was a young and beautiful girl.

The room was narrow and long, not uncomfortably furnished for such a place, with a rug, cot, bedding, a table, easy chair, and other conveniences.

A guitar stood by the window, books were upon the table, and a few artist's materials, with half a dozen unfinished sketches, were at hand.

The large, cathedral like window had no glass in it, but without there was a canvas cloth over it, the outer side painted to resemble the walls, so that when down it not only kept out the sun, rain, and wind, but hid the opening entire.

The maiden stood by the window, gazing out upon the sea and up and down the coast.

From the window she could look sheer down a precipice eighty feet in height, and upon rugged rocks below.

As she stood there her face and form were revealed in the light of the sun, nearing the ocean horizon far beyond. The face was of exquisite beauty, with bronze-hued hair gathered in massive braids and falling far below her waist.

Her form was faultless, and she was clad in a riding habit that fitted it perfectly.

Her riding hat, a sombrero richly embroidered in gold thread, and with a black plume in it, hung on the wall.

"Ah! there comes my *bête noir* now—a man whom I hate, and, had I the power, would kill as I would a wolf.

"He is coming to ask me again if I will consent to become his wife.

"If he only knew me better he would take my life at once, and not wait until my last refusal.

"He will be here soon, and then for another scene.

"If I only could escape, how gladly would I do so, yet there is no escape for me, with those Redskin Ropers as my guards.

"He has them too well trained to cease watching me, and there is no more heart in that old woman who cares for me than there is in a stone.

"She is alike to pity, appeals, and offers of gold a stranger.

"How often I have ridden to this old ruin and admired its picturesque beauty, yet never dreaming that it held a secret

chamber like this, for I always supposed this was the rear wall of the chapel.

"And how little I ever dreamed of ever being held here a captive, and by one whom I once regarded with respect, even friendship.

"Yes, the tide is out, so that he can come by the underground way, through that huge rock.

"No one would ever suspect that a cavern was there and a secret tunnel led up into this old ruin.

"Those old Padres were a very mysterious people, to build such dungeons and secret recesses as they did."

Her eyes were turned upon a horseman who had come along the coast and turned into the inlet, at the head of which stood the old ruin.

The tide was out, and he rode along on the sands, where no one could have passed with the water running in.

He was a man who sat in the saddle with the gracefulness of the perfect horseman, and was dressed as a cowboy of the better class.

His hair and beard were dark, and worn long, and as he rode up the shore he gazed at the window, raising his sombrero to the maiden there, a salute which she did not acknowledge in the slightest way.

Reaching the rock to which she referred, he rode into what appeared to be simply a crevice, as though it had split asunder, but he disappeared entirely, and ten minutes after a trap in the room where the maiden stood was raised, a woman with a wrinkled, cruel face peered up through the opening, and said:

"The Outlaw Ranchero Senor Fuentes desires conversation with the Senorita Samos."

"Oh, admit him," was the impatient response.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST DEMAND.

Looking down the trapdoor all was darkness, for the narrow stairway came up through an aperture built in the solid walls, the entrance to which elsewhere was concealed by a secret door.

But soon after the woman disappeared a man's form came into sight, and the horseman seen on the sands below stepped into the room, closing the trap behind him.

He bowed in a courtly way to the maiden, and crossed over to the window, where he stood apparently enjoying the beautiful marine picture spread out before his vision.

"The senorita had no welcome for me?" he said, slowly.

"You are unwelcome, for I prefer the walls of this old ruin in preference to your presence, Senor Fuentes the Outlaw," was the response.

The man frowned, but answered:

"So there is no relenting yet on your part, Lulita Samos?"

"There never will be, Senor Outlaw."

He stood a moment in silence, and then said:

"Well, I have come to have a last talk with you, and if you will pardon me, I will remove my wig and beard, for they are most uncomfortable."

And standing in the window he took from his head the wig of long black hair, and from his face the full beard that he wore, revealing a dark, sinister face, though a handsome one.

He tossed the wig and beard upon the table, and said, still standing by the open window:

"Well, senorita, we will discuss the situation for the last time."

"There is no need to do so, for I shall remain firm in my resolve."

"Yet hear me."

"You are at liberty to say what you please. I am defenseless and can but listen."

"I wish to review our position toward each other. I came to this vicinity to better my prospects of getting gold, purchased the old Haunted Ranch, and pretended to be an honest ranchero, while in reality I was chief of the outlaw band known as the Gold Ghouls.

"I saw you, loved you, and determined to win you, so plotted to have men of my band capture you, while I should come to the rescue, and thus have a claim upon your friendship.

"In this I was partially successful, but when you refused my love I kidnapped you to force you to my terms.

"A wrecked sailor, who had sought refuge for the night in this ruin, rescued you from me, after wounding me seriously.

"He then held your regard, and sought to destroy me.

"That he, disguised as a Padre, came to my ranch and sent me to the herders of your father, that they might hang me as the Gold Ghoul Chief you know.

"But when this man Marlo deemed me dead I had bought off those who were to hang me, and, raising a band of Indians, pretending to be a redskin myself, I gained my revenge upon him, for he was captured, while I escaped, and taken to his own people, the coasters of Point Desolation, was put to death.

"Well, I again called upon my Redskin Ropers for aid, and am now getting gold by raids and robberies as their chief.

"You are beautiful, rich in your own right, and your father's sole heir.

"I love you, and have asked you to become my wife, to go far from here and help me to live a different life, with you as my guardian angel.

"You have refused, and, kidnapping you a second time, I have brought you here to decide, with the alternative staring you in the face.

"I had this room furnished for you, brought a woman to care for you, and have treated you kindly while here.

"My Redskin Ropers, it is true, have been your guards, but they have also been kept out of your sight, and I have never worried you with my presence, for, throwing off my costume as Red Rover, the Indian Chief, I have been away hunting up booty and gold in my present disguise as a cowboy.

"Now, senorita, I am here again to ask you for your decision, for you have had weeks of captivity to decide what you will do."

The man had spoken in a low voice, his tone sympathetic and his manner earnest. He really looked the devoted lover, as his own confession had made him.

The Senorita Samos had stood back from the window, and had appeared indifferent, but for a flush of anger upon her face.

When he ceased speaking she said:

"Senor Outlaw, I have but one answer to make to you."

"Well?"

"With all my heart and soul I abhor and hate you, and I would prefer death by torture than to be bound to you."

"I do not wish to force you into a marriage with me, as I could do, for I could send for a padre who would unite us, even if you were in a dead faint.

"I wish you to willingly face a priest and become my wife, be the motive what it may, for it will be that you do so to escape death."

"I prefer death."

"This is my final demand, remember."

"And my unflinching resolve, remember."

"I will, if you refuse me still, order my Red Ropers to hurl you to your death from this window."

She coolly stepped to the window, and, glancing down, said:

"I prefer such death to an unholy alliance with you, hating you as I do."

"I have made my last demand, and in twenty-four hours you die, unless you send me word that you relent."

"You have my answer, sir. Leave me."

She drew herself up in a commanding manner, and in silence he picked up his wig and beard, replaced them, and, with a glance out of the window, turned and left the room with the words upon his lips:

"I have made my last demand, Lulita Samos."

CHAPTER III.
THE REWARD.

The same afternoon of the scene between the outlaw and his captive, a man was coming slowly along the coast, some distance above the ruined mission.

His hair was long and unkempt, his face had a beard upon it of many weeks' growth, and his clothes were much the worse for wear.

He was dressed in a sailor suit, with a tarpaulin sheltering his head, and well-worn shoes were upon his feet.

A canvas bag hung with a blanket at his back, and a lariat was thrown over his shoulder, a knife being in his belt, but he revealed no other weapons.

In spite of his appearance of a vagabond sailor, his sunken eyes and haggard face, there was something attractive about the man.

Halting at a spot where there had been a camp, he muttered:

"I will stop here for rest and food, such as I can get of either.

"A day's travel in my condition will bring me to the Haunted Hacienda, and I will see who is master there, for there is much for me to do to gain my revenge and gold.

"Ah! how close was my last call by death.

"My God! it seems that I am fated to be alive and yet have men believe me dead.

"Once I was wrecked on this very coast, in view of yonder old ruin on that cliff, and I alone survived.

"The lightning killed my crew, my craft was set on fire and driven ashore, and I was the sole survivor, escaping from my pursuers, from God's wrath, from fire, and the sea.

"Then fortune favored me, for in yonder old ruin I met her, and I loved her.

"I drove Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero, to his death, as I believed, and took his place. I turned bandit and sought revenge upon the coasters, who had driven me from among them for my evil deeds.

"I attacked their ranches, believing I would surprise them, and they were ready for me, killed most of my men, and drove the others to death over the cliff; but I escaped!

"Oh, yes. I always escape!

"Then Fuentes appears, as though from the grave, and dashes my cup of hope of winning the Senorita Samos and her money for my own, and I was surprised by my worst foe, that Boy Coaster, Ralph Rollo, and sent to be tried by my own people.

"Heaven have mercy! will I ever forget that midnight trial, those black-garbed forms, those masked faces, and the sentence that was passed upon me to die.

"To be loaded with chains and be taken out in a boat by my executioner and sunk in the sea alive.

"And the executioner, the one who had drawn the lot as such, proved to be my rival, my worst foe, that Boy Coaster, Ralph Rollo.

"He had not the heart to kill me, and so he played the coward and spared me.

"He bade me fly and lead a better life, and, landing me at the other shore, told me to go my way, and gave me what gold he had.

"Bah! he was a coward and he will live to regret the day he set me free at risk of his own life, for the Tribunal of Coasters would put him to death did they know it.

"Yes, he will regret it, for I never forgive, never forget a foe, and though a fugitive and a vagabond now, almost penniless, wholly friendless, and in the eyes of all a dead man, I shall yet be able to strike a blow upon those I hate, and to win riches and gold.

"I was born to be thought dead and yet live.

"I shall only become peaceful when like a cat, I have been dead to the world eight times—the ninth I will dread.

"Ah! what is that stuck up there on that tree?"

His eyes had fallen upon a paper fast-

ened upon a tree in the edge of the deserted camp.

He laid aside his canvas bag of food, and, rising, walked to the tree.

What he saw there was a placard, and he read it aloud.

It was as follows:

"REWARD.

"I, Senor Samos, of the Hacienda Samos, do hereby offer the following rewards.

"First: Ten thousand dollars in gold upon information that will lead to the rescue of my daughter, the Senorita Samos, from the hands of her kidnapper, who is beyond doubt Marco Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero of the Haunted Hacienda.

"Second: Ten thousand dollars for information that will lead to my securing the body of the said Marco Fuentes, dead or alive."

Such was the placard, and when the vagabond sailor had read it he said savagely:

"So Fuentes did escape after all, and has kidnapped the Senorita Lulita.

"He will not dare harm her, but knows well that her father will pay a big ransom for her, and so will use it to get out of the country, for he has not the courage that I have, and will not dare remain.

"Well, why should not I win that gold?

"Both rewards should be mine, and in spite of being also an outlaw I will hold another claim upon the Senorita Samos for her friendship.

"Yes, I must get that gold, and I can, for Fuentes has taken her to the Haunted Hacienda, and still has her hidden in some of the secret recesses of the old place.

"But I know them all, better even than he does, and he believes I am dead.

"Yes, and had I not found that camp of the trading schooner, which had run in to repair a leak, I would have died of starvation ere this, with no weapons to kill game for myself.

"But they gave me food enough to last me for some time yet.

"Now to eat my dinner, and then to set about getting that reward, and with it my revenge, for I shall kill Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero.

"Ha! ha! I shall kill Fuentes and rescue the fair Lulita."

CHAPTER IV.

THE VAGABOND'S DISCOVERY.

The man finished his meal; then he took the placard from the tree, and, folding it, placed it in an inner pocket.

He then started once more upon his journey.

"I will spend to-night in yonder old mission," he mused, "for ghosts have no terror for me now, and to-morrow night I seek the Haunted Hacienda, for I am sure Fuentes is hidden there, and there also is his captive, the fair Lulita."

He tramped on for a while, when he descried a man on horseback just ahead. To leap into a thicket was his instant act, and soon the horseman passed within a few feet of where he was crouching.

"Oh! if I only had a revolver I could drop him from his saddle and secure his horse and weapons," thought the sailor, "or, if I had only seen him sooner I could have caught him with my lariat. Who is he, I wonder? He is turning down upon the beach, so where is he going?"

The sailor watched until he saw the horseman ride, as it appeared, right into the face of the rock!

"Oh, ho! that means an entrance there!

"Well, I'll wait until he comes out; then I'll use the lasso and get his horse and weapons!"

The sailor skulked along to a pile of rocks, around which grew a few scrub pines, which afforded a hiding place.

His lariat he tied to a tree; then he sat down to wait.

As he did so he glanced up at the old

ruin, and fairly started to behold a woman's face and form appear at the window, not a hundred yards from where he was hiding.

"My God! it is Lulita Samos! She is not, then, a prisoner in the Haunted Hacienda, but here in this old ruined mission!

"And Fuentes, where can he be? Who was the horseman, and did he enter the mission through a secret passage? Ah! there the man appears at the window, and Lulita retreats from it!

"Who can he be?"

And there crouched the vagabond sailor, all excitement now, his eyes riveted upon the window in the old chapel, where stood the man who had lately passed so near him, and in the background he could see the form of the maiden.

"Ha!"

The exclamation broke from his lips as he beheld the man at the window remove his sombrero, then his wig and false beard.

A laugh of demoniacal joy followed the act that betrayed the man in the window to his watching, waiting foe.

"Ha! ha! ha! it is Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero! Now am I a made man. He is not in the Haunted Hacienda, as I supposed, but here in this old mission.

"He dare not go there, so comes here, and knows this ruin well, for he has brought his captive here.

"He entered it, too, horse and all, through that rock, so there is an underground passage leading up the hill into the ruin.

"But the tide is now coming in, and he dare not come out of the ruin by way of the rock, so I must go to the trail along the ridge, which leads to the mission, the only way I supposed there was to get there.

"But he is not alone, that is certain, so I must be cautious. He has men with him, beyond all doubt!"

Still watching, he saw the man in the window gesticulating, as though vehement in what he was saying, and soon after replace the false beard and wig and turn away.

Thus the minutes passed; then Lulita Samos once more returned to the window and gazed out upon the setting sun.

"He has gone, but has he left the mission? I hope not; but if he has, he will return, and so I will take my position upon the ridge and wait.

"If I cannot catch him, I can go to the Senor Samos, and tell him where his daughter is and claim both rewards, for Fuentes will be taken also, though I should hate to have him die by other hands than mine."

CHAPTER V.

A VAIN APPEAL.

The unfortunate captive of an outlaw stood by the window until she saw the sun go down in the blue waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Her beautiful face showed traces of suffering, and the last glint of sunlight glistened upon tears in her glorious eyes.

"If that man will dare keep his terrible threat I am ready to meet my fate," she mused aloud.

"Better be dashed to pieces on the rocks below than become his wife from fear of death.

"My poor father! how sad must your heart be to feel that I am lost to you, perhaps forever.

"But Fuentes loves gold, and in the end, when he sees that I will not yield, then I have a hope that he will be willing to sell me for ransom, the large ransom which he knows he will get for my safe return.

"Ah! what a sad lot has been mine in meeting two men, in face and form looking as though they were noble specimens of manhood, and in heart blacker than sin itself.

"Some one is coming—it is that old tigress, Fuego.

"She is properly named, for she has eyes of fire and a nature, too."

"I have brought the senorita a lamp

and her supper," said a female voice, and she added: "If she has any desire to eat after the last visit of the senor."

"Oh, yes; neither you nor your master can keep me from trying to prevent my strength failing while here."

"I do not intend to starve myself, woman."

"The senorita is wise, for were I going to die on the gallows to-morrow I would be glad to attend a feast to-night."

"You look it."

"Thank you, senorita," and the woman placed a basket upon the table and set before the maiden some bread, fruit, and preserves.

She had placed a lamp also upon the table, and now, stepping to the window, lowered the canvas curtain, with the remark:

"A light can be seen a long way at sea, senorita, and one in this window might attract attention, you know."

"Woman, who are you?"

"I have American, Indian, and Mexican blood in my veins, senorita."

"Then I plead in vain to you for help."

"You do."

"Where did you meet Fuentes?"

"I knew him in 'Frisco long ago, when he saved my son from the gallows."

"I have never forgotten him for it, and when the ignorant fools said I was a witch, he sent me away in a vessel bound down the coast."

"I got work in the herders' camp a day's journey below here, and when the Senor Fuentes came to me and said he was going to kidnap a maiden and he wished me to come and care for her, I gladly did so, and would have done so without his promise of liberal pay."

"You are poor, then?"

"Do I look like a wealthy aristocrat, one such as you are?"

"I confess that you do not; but you love gold."

"Only a fool does not."

"You would be rich, would you not?"

"I would cut your pretty throat for gold, senorita," was the savage reply.

In spite of her nerve Lulita Samos shuddered at the words of the woman; but, after a moment, she said:

"I can tell you how you can make more money than by committing an act so foul, and not have my life upon your conscience, either."

"My conscience? I have no conscience, girl," with a bitter laugh.

"Then you are to be pitied, indeed."

"Don't pity me, for I do not want your compassion. I have no heart or soul now, no conscience."

"Once I was as beautiful as you are, girl; but beauty proved my curse, for my life was wrecked by one I loved. I killed him with this good right hand of mine, and so was avenged."

"His son I loved—my own darling son, and yet he had his father's blood in him and went to the bad. He killed a man, and but for Senor Fuentes, as I told you, would have been hanged. But the senor aided him to escape, and the boy is now a fugitive, so I have no one to care for; no home, no friends."

"And yet it is in my power to give you a home, to care for you kindly in your old age; or I can give you what to you will be a fortune, for I will pay you a large sum in gold if you will set me free, if you will only let it appear that I have escaped."

"Girl, I would not for ten thousand dollars betray the trust put in me by Fuentes; you appeal to me in vain."

"I will give you more than the sum you name if you will aid me to escape."

"Escape? When Senor Fuentes has in this old mission his band of Redskin Ropers? Impossible!"

"With your aid I might."

"My aid you shall never have," was the stern reply.

"Think of the money you throw away."

"What would I do with a sum so large?"

"You could buy a home and comfort in your declining years."

"Had I my son with me I might be tempted; but he has gone from me for-

ever, and I can get along with what I earn and have already laid by.

"No. You appeal to one without a conscience, girl, and where greed of gold would not tempt her to betray Senor Fuentes."

"Now, eat your supper and do not again attempt to bribe me."

"I will not waste words in making another effort to tempt you, or to incite your pity," was the response of the maiden.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REDSKIN KIDNAPPERS.

The same horseman whom the Vagabond Sailor had seen riding over the sands of the inlet toward the rock under the shadows of the old mission, was going at a rapid gallop along the ridge the next day on the trail to the old ruin.

On approaching the coast he came to a spot from whence a view could be obtained of the ocean, and as he halted to glance seaward he started at beholding a vessel coming close in shore.

It was a long way off then, but through a glass which swung at his saddle horn he made out that it was a steamer—an armed vessel.

"It is the United States cutter, and she is not running so close in shore without a purpose."

"Does it mean that some one has discovered that the senorita is in the mission, and that the cutter has been sent down to storm the place?"

"I must take no chances; no telling what may be in the wind, so must have her removed to-night to the Haunted Hacienda."

"I have not dared go there since my escape, and I do not know whether Carlos and his wife are still faithful to me; but I can enter through the secret tunnel, which they do not know of, and take the senorita to one of the hidden rooms in the chapel."

The rider immediately dashed off along the ridge to the old mission, but did not see a man suddenly start from his blanket among the rocks, awakened by his coming, nor hear his deeply uttered anathema at having allowed his one hated enemy to go by him.

Reaching the old mission, the horseman rode up to a perfect network of swinging vines, drew them one side, and into an arched door thus exposed his horse entered.

The corridor he found himself in led into a walled chamber, in the rear of which was a doorway.

A rap upon this caused it to be opened, though it had the appearance of not having been disturbed for a generation, and the horseman found himself within a large chapel.

The door by which he entered led in from the vestry-room, and here were standing a score of horses, while in the chapel as many redskins were stretched about in various attitudes, but all arose at his entrance.

"I have come to tell my Red Ropers that a ship with big guns is running down the coast and may land a force here."

"I have also seen the strange trails about which my braves have told me and the papers upon the trees, one of which offers much gold for the return of the maiden."

"If she does not obey my will, then we will have to restore her for the ransom offered, though I have told her she was to die."

"Gold is worth more, however, than seeing her die, and if she holds out in her determined way, then we will sell her for all we can get."

"Here she is not safe, so let two of my braves take her away as soon as the night falls."

"Put her upon her own horse, bind her to the saddle, and let them go by way of the rocks and beach, for there may be people on the ridge trail."

"Let my other braves pack up the traps in the maiden's room, and with the

woman Fuego come to the Three Rocks, one mile from the Haunted Hacienda."

"I will meet the two braves there with the maiden, and after taking her to a place of safety will return to the Three Rocks to meet the woman and my other braves, to lead them to a retreat in the Haunted Hacienda safer than this. Do my Ropers understand?"

The Indians signified that they did fully understand, and then the outlaw leader added:

"I will return through the tunnel and the beach to the Haunted Hacienda to-night, and before dawn will be at the Three Rocks to meet my braves and their captive."

With this he left the chapel, mounted a fresh horse, and went out the way he had entered, through the vine-covered archway, the existence of which the closest searcher would never have suspected.

Turning into another archway, also covered with vines, which he drew to one side, he lighted a lantern, and rode through a dark tunnelway that descended as he went along.

The way was winding, and after a ride of nearly an eighth of a mile he saw a glimmer of light ahead.

At once he extinguished his lantern and placed it upon a shelf of rock, coming out a moment after through a crevice of a rock which, from the outside, owing to a bend in it, failed to disclose the mouth of a cavern that formed the tunnelway to the old mission.

"Now for the Haunted Hacienda!" he muttered; and as he wheeled from the shore into the timber he saw that the cutter was still coming in, though yet miles away.

"It will be after nightfall before she arrives; but she is surely coming here," he said, as he rode on his way.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OUTLAW'S SECRET.

It was a fortunate thing for the horseman that he did not take the way back by the ridge trail.

Had he done so he would have found one waiting for him, ready and eager to send the Outlaw Ranchero to his death.

Having gained the timber, the outlaw went at a brisk canter up among the hills, and thence over a rolling country, following no trails, but going as though he well knew the way.

Night overtook him before he had ridden many miles, but he still held on, and at last drew rein in a cover of timber at the base of a cliff.

There were three huge pieces of rocks, which had fallen from the cliff and lodged some twenty feet up on a shelf of stone.

Near the base of the cliff was a stream, looking like running silver as it glided along in the moonlight, and into this, where the trail crossed it, the outlaw urged his horse.

Going along in the stream, against the current, for several hundred yards, the horseman turned suddenly off to the left, riding straight up the steep and rocky hillside.

Within fifty feet he came to a shelf of rock some four feet in width, and along this he made his way until he reached the three pieces of rock.

Behind these was visible a cave in the cliff, but not to be seen from below.

Dismounting, for it was not high enough to admit horse and rider, the outlaw turned into the cave, and taking a candle and match from his pocket, soon had a light.

By this he made his way through what was seen to be a natural tunnel, here and there, by artificial means, made wide enough to permit a horse to pass through.

The way was slightly winding, and very long it seemed, for it was all of ten minutes before the man reached the end.

Here there was a heavy wooden door, which swung open at a push, and leading his horse through, he found himself

in a large subterranean chamber with lights in the roof here and there.

Through them came air and light enough to see dimly without the candle.

He then fastened his horse, and there was room for a score more animals without crowding; then he crossed the chamber to a narrow door in the wall, and which stood half open.

Entering this he found a very narrow passageway, ending in stone steps. These he ascended to a height of fifty feet or more.

It brought him out into a chimney, large, and with an iron door in one side which, upon being opened, led into an upper chamber, where the door opening from the chimney appeared like a panel in the wall, and was no different from half a dozen others that were there.

Once in this chamber, deserted for many and many a year, through a door the outlaw passed into a corridor.

Following this, he soon came to a window. Through that he climbed, coming out upon a flat roof.

Suddenly, through two other windows near shone a light. Iron bars were in the window, but the glass sash, swung on hinges, was then raised. Noiselessly the man crept to the window nearest to him and gazed down into the room.

He was looking from the roof into what were his own quarters, when he had been at the ranch, and he knew just how the room was situated and furnished.

Two persons were in the room, and they were talking in a tone that distinctly reached the ears of the listener.

One was a man, the other a woman, and both were people of striking appearance.

Their dark faces indicated their Spanish blood, with a mixture of American. The man was tall, sinewy, and graceful, while his face was attractive and intelligent, with a look of bold determination.

The woman was of slender form, elegant in carriage, and with a face of fascinating expression.

The two were well dressed, almost richly so, in the Mexican style, with a mixture of cowboy outfit in the man's attire.

The two had been lovers since their early years, had been separated by a cruel fate, the woman being wedded through parental authority to a man she despised, a cruel wretch, who sought to get rid of a rival who was in his way, yet whom he had never seen, in praying for his life to be taken. In this he failed, yet he had wedded the maiden and made her his slave when adversity overtook him and he became the confidential servant of Senor Fuentes.

A change came when Marlo became master of the Haunted Hacienda, the woman's hated husband being quickly put aside, and Carlos Canovas, her lover, who had kept near her through all, unknown to her husband, however, at once, when she was widowed, claiming her as his bride.

And these were the two upon whom Fuentes the Outlaw Ranchero looked in upon, when, by his secret knowledge of the hacienda, he reached the roof by way of the tunnel from the Three Rocks to the old ruin, for the place was little better.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTLAW EAVESDROPPER.

The two people in the wing of the Haunted Hacienda little dreamed that there was an eye upon them—an ear listening to their every word.

They were apparently content with their lot, reunited after the break in their lives by the forced marriage of El Cinto with the man whom her parents had decided should be her husband.

That husband, Juan, was in his grave, and neither seemed to care to recall that he had ever lived.

Carlos Canovas was smoking a pipe, a handsome one, too, it was, a skull and crossbones handsomely carved of wood, and which had belonged to Fuentes, as the latter saw from his perch on the roof.

El Cinto was engaged in sewing, and the two were talking over the events that had occurred in their lives.

"It seems fated, El Cinto, that we should have this ranch and its cattle, without purchase or gift," said the man.

"Yes, it would seem so, Carlos, for when Senor Fuentes was robbed of it by Senor Marlo, the latter pretended to buy it from him, saying he would pay to whoever the Senor Fuentes said, the purchase money for it.

"Now, it cost the Senor Fuentes in the first place but a small sum, and then he improved it at considerable expense.

"But the money for all this came from his robberies, and had he been content to dwell here in peace and honesty, he could have gotten rich.

"If he did buy a few horses and cattle, many of the others of the herds and droves were stolen, run off from far distant ranches."

"And Marlo was no better."

"Not a whit, only I feel more kindly toward him, as it was through him that Juan was slain and I was thus able to be your wife, Carlos."

"True, and for that I thank him; but he was as base as Senor Fuentes, and the two really deserved hanging."

"Senor Marlo got his punishment, as you know the Senorita Lamos told us when she stopped here some days before her capture.

"What his fate was no one seems to know, yet he was put to death by his people, the Coasters."

"Yes, and Fuentes deserves death, too, for he had no right to kidnap that beautiful young lady."

"I only wish he had brought her here, Carlos, for then I would have set her free."

"Yes, indeed, for no brave man would war against a woman."

"No, indeed."

"As long as Fuentes committed his robberies far from here, it was none of our affair.

"He did not make us his allies nor the receivers of his stolen plunder, so that lets us out of any connection with his evil deeds.

"He left here to continue his evil deeds, and I am glad that he did not make the hacienda his retreat, for I never would have allowed him to hold captive here the Senorita Lulita."

"Nor I, and if I only knew where he had her hidden I would gladly attempt her rescue."

"As I would, and we would get a reward for her return to her home."

"Yes, and there is a large one offered for the body of Fuentes, dead or alive, Carlos."

"True, El Cinto, but that I would never touch.

"Fuentes was our employer, he treated us fairly well, and I never would betray him, not for any sum."

"Nor would I, Carlos; but he should not hold that sweet lady captive against her will, or rob her father by a ransom for her return."

"That is another thing.

"No, he should not do that; but the Senor Samos would reward us well for our rescue of her."

"Oh, yes, and with it and what we have saved up, we would be rich."

"But this ranch and cattle, El Cinto?"

"How do you mean?"

"Senor Fuentes is a fugitive, an outlaw, and dare not come to claim it."

"True."

"If Senor Marlo really did purchase it, he is dead."

"Yes."

"We are in full charge."

"So we are."

"Then, after a while, if Senor Fuentes is captured, or hanged, will it not belong to us?"

"Well, Carlos, I feel just that way about it."

"Yes."

"I suppose it would belong to us."

"It would."

"Yet not justly or legally, and if I knew the one to whom Fuentes, when he thought he was to be hanged, told Marlo to pay the purchase money, I should consider that we ought to at least send half of its value to that one."

"It was a woman."

"Ah! a woman?"

"Yes, for Marlo told me so, and, in fact, I heard the name and address, so put it down, and it is on the stone whereon I wrote, after I left his room."

"Then we can ease our consciences by paying her half the amount, at least."

"Yes, and then live on here until we enrich ourselves by the increase of cattle."

"But there must be no more connection with Fuentes, should he turn up, as I fear he will, he will surely get us into trouble in the end."

"True, and to-morrow, Carlos, do you go and see if you can find where he has hidden the Senorita Lulita."

"I will."

"My God! this is no place for me."

"I must hasten from here, and not make myself known, that is certain."

"But they know not of the secret tunnel, and for the present I can hide the senorita here, and also my red men, until we can get rid of these two people."

"Yes, it would be madness to make myself known here; but these two shall die, and then I will be master of the Haunted Ranch once more."

And so saying the outlaw eavesdropper hastened away.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DESPAIR.

Like a thief did Fuentes the Outlaw sneak away from his own home.

He had overheard, as eavesdroppers most always do, no good of himself.

He felt that to make his presence known would perhaps cause him to be captured by Carlos and his wife, and held as a hostage until he divulged the secret of where he had hidden Senorita Lulita Samos.

So, vowing vengeance against the two traitors, as he called them, simply because they would not aid him in a great wrong against the Senorita Lulita, he made his way back the way he had come, to the large rock chamber where he had left his horse.

He then sat down to think, and at last recalled that he must have food for those who were coming, as well as for himself, for the stores in the old mission were running low.

He knew that he could, after Carlos and his wife retired for the night, get into the plaza and thence to the storehouse, which was by the spring in the grounds, and never kept locked.

"I will have time to get the provisions before the arrival at the Three Rocks of the Indians with the captive," he said.

So he made his way back to the hacienda, and reached the plaza by a way known only to himself.

Reaching the storehouse, which was most liberally supplied, he secured candles, sugar, flour, and other provisions in quantities not to attract attention that a theft had been committed, though he was stealing from himself.

Back to his retreat in the underground chamber he went, with a bag full of the things he had secured, and having placed them in a safe place, he made his way on foot to the end of the tunnel.

He came out at the Three Rocks, and perching himself on a point of observation, awaited the coming of his captive and her guards.

Tired out, he sunk to sleep, and when he awoke the sun was rising.

He was positively frightened at the sight of day, for nowhere was visible the party he had expected.

He ventured to climb down the rocks and search for a trail of the guards.

What he beheld was a large trail, made by a score of horses, yet they had not come very near the cliff.

One trail led from the large one to the

cliff, and after wandering about, as he could see, for a while, went back to the one it had left.

"One brave came here to find me, and as I was asleep, went away.

"These were the Redskin Ropers who halted here, while one man rode to the cliff.

"Now, where have they gone?

"But the senorita and her two guards, why did they not come?

"My God! what has happened.

"Let me see; there were twenty-seven horses all told in the old mission, and I'll count the tracks.

"Yes, here are the tracks of twenty-three.

"The senorita's horse, those of her two guards, and my own make up the other four, so that is proof that she was not along with the band.

"Where is she?

"I dare not go by daylight to find out, for I might be seen by Carlos or his cowboys, perhaps by some one from the other ranches.

"I can only wait here until night, and then ride with all haste to the old mission.

"Ah! I recall now the steamer.

"Can they have landed and captured the old mission?

"But my red men were not taken, and the two braves with the senorita were to leave some time before they did.

"I cannot understand it all, but to-night will tell me all.

"What if I have lost the senorita, and cannot find my Redskin Ropers.

"Then indeed will I be in despair."

The cold sweat fell in great drops from his forehead, and, weak from excitement, he retraced his way to the cliff.

Then he thought his horse must have food and water if he was to depend upon him for safety, and he went to the rock chamber and led him out, staking him in a little vale securely hidden from any one passing along the trail, and where he had the best of grass and water in abundance.

Then he sat down on the rocks and forced himself to eat his breakfast, though it nearly choked him.

"I must keep up my strength," he muttered, and he ate, though with no enjoyment.

The day was the longest of his life, and it seemed as though it would never pass.

He watched the shadows, marked them, and then waited to see how long they took to lengthen.

At last he ate his second meal, just as the shadows filled the little vale, though the cliff top was yet glimmering with the last rays of sunlight.

He saddled his horse then, and mounting, rode to the trail just at twilight.

He could wait no longer, for he was in despair, and so set out upon his ride to the old mission.

If he did not find that some cause had detained his captive there he would be in a mood of desperation.

"The sooner I know the truth the better," he said with grim resignation, as he started forth upon the trail to the old mission.

CHAPTER X. DESERTED.

Affairs at the old mission meanwhile had undergone a change, which can now be explained.

The two guards who had been told to leave the old mission with the captive after nightfall, and go to the rendezvous of the cliff of the Three Rocks, had faithfully performed their task as far as they were able to do so.

There was one thing about the Redskin Ropers, and that was their blind obedience to their chief, white man though he was.

The guards had left the old mission, as told, by way of the tunnel to the shore, and had bound their captive to her saddle.

Seeking foes only on the land they

had not cast a look out over the waters, so failed to notice a vessel lying at anchor a short distance away in the mouth of the inlet.

They had not seen a small gig come ashore with a single occupant; nor had they noted his discovery of them; his heading them off by a rapid run across a point, while they followed the beach.

A shot, another, the fall of a rider, of a horse, and a desperate struggle between one of the braves and a man in the uniform of an officer followed, with the later the victor, and Lulita Samos was rescued.

A hail to the ship, a boat's crew of armed men, and the old mission, under the guidance of Lulita, was invaded.

But the Redskin Ropers, alarmed by the shots, had taken flight along the ridge trail, leaving behind them the secret chamber, which Lulita could not find, having been blindfolded upon entering and leaving it.

And more; in their flight, when the Red Ropers beheld the vessel off shore, they had even forgotten to give warning to Fuego, the old hag who acted as keeper of the captive.

She saw the flight, beheld the invasion of the old ruin, and fled to a hiding place, where she crouched until the sailors had gone, but she heard their voices and knew that the gallant rescuer of the maiden was called Captain Yerger by his men, and that he was to escort the maiden that night to her distant home, where her father's sad heart would be overwhelmed with joy at the return of his daughter.

The old woman also heard the rescuer say that he had run down the coast to visit the Senorita Samos and her father, and had come ashore there to see the old mission in the moonlight, and thus discovered that she was a captive to the Redskin Ropers.

In terror the old woman kept in hiding until the dawn, and then crept from her retreat.

She knew that the secret chamber had not been found, and there she would be safe.

From the window, peering through a hole in the canvas curtain, she saw the cutter get under weigh and steam to a little harbor up the coast a couple of leagues.

She had hoped it was going away, but breathed more freely to find that it had gone thus far.

Where the Redskin Ropers had gone she did not know; but certainly they would return for her, or, if not they, the chief would do so, she felt assured.

The woman was terribly frightened, for she felt that she would be very roughly treated if it was known just what she was, and why should not the senorita, her unfortunate captive, tell?

"I am sorry now I was such a fool, not to accept her gold and go home with her.

"I have lost what to me would be a fortune by my faithfulness to Senor Fuentes.

"It must be a lesson to me, for I will never be a like fool again.

"Here I am, deserted by the senor and his cowardly redskins, who ran off like sheep, leaving me to my fate.

"If the sailors do not return I have food here to last me for some time, for there was a week's stores for all of us, the chief said.

"In time I can get away.

"Fortunately I have the chief's rifles and other weapons to defend myself with; yes, and to shoot game when I need it.

"Well, I am not so bad off if they never come for me, as I can make my way back to the Herders' camps.

"Ha! what a grand thing it would be for me to dwell in this old ruin, for I care nothing for company.

"Here could I live mistress of all I survey, comfortable the year around in these quarters.

"If the refined and luxurious liver, the Senorita Samos, could stand the life here, I certainly can.

"I must go to the Herders, though, and

see that one of them brings me provisions twice a year.

"But what has become of the chief?

"Will he return here?

"How will he take the escape of his captive, for it will destroy all his plans.

"How handsome was that young officer, as I peered at him in the moonlight.

"Ah! that I had a son like that, then would I not be the wretch that I am.

"The girl will love him, of course, and that will make a pretty romance, if Senor Fuentes does not again strike a blow to end it all.

"And he will if he can.

"Well, here I am, in this old ruin all alone, and I need have no fear of ghosts and goblins, for I will find nothing here worse than myself."

With this philosophical conclusion the woman set about making herself comfortable and contented.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LASSO THROWER IN AMBUSH.

The Vagabond Sailor, who had so cursed himself for his lost opportunity to capture Fuentes the Outlaw Ranchero when he found his place of ambush, was as patient as an Indian in his watching and waiting for his return.

He knew not what was going on at the old mission, for he had taken up his position just at the end of the ridge, over a mile distant from the ruin.

He had heard the clattering of hoofs as the Redskin Ropers came in flight from the ruin, and had watched them closely as they drew near and then swept by, but no sign of the man he hated.

"He is not with them, but has sent them upon a raid," he muttered. Then he counted them and said:

"Eighteen, and he has twenty. That means that two still remain with him at the old mission; so, armed as I am, I would not dare go there.

"But I feel that Fuentes will yet pass this way, and when he does then comes my revenge!"

So he determined to wait and watch.

He ate his frugal meals, slept when he dared, for his serape was spread out among the rocks, crept off now and then to a stream not far away for a drink of water, and, with all the patience of an Indian, held to his post.

Thus the day passed, and night came to find the Vagabond Sailor alert and expectant. One end of the lariat was fastened to a stout stump in the clump of bushes; the rest of the rope was lying close at his hand, coiled, ready for instant use.

Not so very long did he have to wait, for, when two hours had passed, suddenly he heard the sound of hoofs.

They were approaching, for they grew louder and louder, but his hearing quickly told him that the horse was not coming from the old mission—that he was coming toward it!

"It cannot be the Outlaw Ranchero," he decided, not knowing that the horseman had left the mission by the tunnel and shore.

The horse was in a canter and soon appeared in sight.

Then Marlo could hardly restrain a shout as, recognizing his victim in the bright moonlight, he said in a suppressed tone, as he grasped his lariat:

"It is Fuentes, my foe!

"This night he dies!"

CHAPTER XII.

VICTOR AND VICTIM.

Along the trail came Fuentes, riding at a canter, and just thinking of going at a slower pace, then fastening his horse and creeping to the old mission on foot to see if his two guards and captive were still there.

He had not been able to discover by the trails whether the Redskin Ropers had returned to the old mission when they did not find him at the cliff of the Three Rocks.

But he hoped such was the case. In his uncertainty he felt considerably unnerved.

There was a sinking sensation about the heart which often comes to us with a foreboding of evil, that all was not going well with him.

Suddenly his horse gave a bound to one side, almost turning the back of his rider upon the pile of rocks upon the left of the trail, for the lasso of the lurking Marlo had suddenly been hurled out of the shadow, and, true to its aim, it had caught Fuentes about the body, pinioning his arms to his side.

The next instant there comes a sharp twang, and the form of Fuentes was jerked violently from the saddle and fell heavily upon the ground.

At the same instant out of the shadow darted Marlo, just as the horse wheeled to run back on the trail, and grasping his bridle rein he held him fast.

To hobble him with the lariat hanging from the saddle was but the work of a second.

Then the victor sprung upon the form of his victim.

The jerk of the lariat and fall had knocked the breath out of Fuentes, as well as bruising him severely.

With agile hands Marlo made knot after knot of the lariat around the form of his captive, pinioning his arms beyond all movement.

Fuentes was just then incapable of any resistance, and raised upon the shoulders of his captor, was borne to a secluded spot off the trail.

There he was placed upon the sward while Marlo returned for his horse, and staked him out to feed, as though he was in no hurry to depart from the place.

When he returned to his prisoner he found him writhing in an effort to escape.

Seating himself in front of him, on a rock, he said imperiously:

"Marco Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero, who am I, your captor?"

"Curse you! I do not know."

"Who does my face remind you of?"

"I do not know."

"See, look well in the moonlight."

"I never saw it before."

"You lie!"

"I am bound, you see, so only a coward could insult one thus situated."

"I am no coward, Fuentes; but tell me, whose voice does mine remind you of?"

"Good Mother!"

"Ah, you shudder now."

"No, no, you are not he, for he is dead, dead!"

"Yes. I am dead, dead, if you refer to Marlo the Merciless."

"No! no! no! the grave does not give up its dead."

"Yet you, supposed to be dead, haunted me as a ghost."

"You are no ghost! You cannot deceive me thus, for I am no superstitious fool."

"I am the ghost of Merciless Marlo, the Cowboy Coaster, Senor Fuentes, for, as you said, he is dead!" was the impressive response of the Sailor Vagabond, who certainly looked very little like the accepted idea of a wanderer from the Land of Spirits.

"No! no! you know that Marlo was my foe, that he was put to death by his people, the Coasters of Point Desolation, and you would frighten me by pretending to be his spirit."

"It is not so, for I tell you the truth."

"I am Marlo."

"No."

"I am."

"Prove it!"

"I can prove it by telling you how I rescued the Senorita Samos in the old mission from you, and, playing the part of a padre, sent you, as I believed, to be hanged as the chief of the Gold Ghouls, and took your Haunted Hacienda from you."

"How you, not being dead, haunted

me, I believing it was your ghost, and then how you, as Red Raven, the Chief of the Red Ropers, lured me to capture, and, as you believed, sent me back among my people to be put to death.

"I was, to their satisfaction, put to death."

"I was, to all the world, sent to my grave."

"I am to-day dead to all the world except to you and to myself."

"A vagabond, I was lured to come here like a wandering spirit."

"I beheld the face and form of the Senorita Lulita in the window of the old mission two days ago."

"I saw you ride near me, but did not know you, then."

"I saw you come to that same window where your captive had appeared, and remove your wig and false beard."

"Then I knew you, Marco Fuentes."

"I read the reward offered for the return of the senorita to her father."

"I read the reward offered for your body, dead or alive."

"I determined to win those rewards, and so, unarmed, half starving, having only my trusty lariat, I came here to capture you."

"I have done so."

"I have you in my power, and alive."

"I will soon have your scalp in my hands, going to claim the reward from Senor Samos."

"Then I will get the reward for returning the Senorita Samos to her home."

"Who is victor now, Fuentes?" and the man laughed in a frenzied way, as though his vicious joy was driving him mad.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN APPEAL FOR TERMS.

There was no longer any doubt in the mind of Fuentes that he was face to face with the man whom he had most cause to fear.

The haggard face, ragged beard, long, unkempt hair at last were seen to be the effect of suffering, anxiety, hardship, and inattention to his personal appearance, so different from the dandy Marlo he had known.

"Well, Marlo, I cannot but admit now that you are no ghost, but your own devilish self, though greatly changed in the time since last we met, and it has not been so very long, either," he said, putting on an air of bravado he was far from feeling.

"Yes, I am so changed that I can face the Senorita Samos and her father and not be known by them."

"You will not dare to do so."

"Yes, as soon as I have killed you I will go to the hacienda, secure her, and take her to her home."

"You will find twenty Indian braves there to guard her."

"No, for those braves left the old mission night before last."

"Not all of them."

"Eighteen did."

"There are two more there."

"With your weapons they will be nothing to me."

"Let me tell you something."

"Talk quick."

"I know that my braves are not there, for they were to meet me at a certain rendezvous."

"Did they meet you?"

"No, or rather I was asleep and did not see them."

"Well?"

"My captive was to come another way to the rendezvous, escorted by two of my braves."

"Yes."

"She did not come."

"No."

"Then she is at the old mission still?"

"That is what I do not know."

"Well?"

"I was on my way there to find out when you lassoed me."

"Yes."

"Now we can come to terms."

"Can we?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"I will go on with you to the old mission and find the senorita."

"I can find her as well."

"You cannot."

"Why?"

"You do not know the secret entrance."

"Your horse will show me."

"Ah!"

"Yes, so you see, I need no aid from you."

"You can never find the room where she is held prisoner."

"I think I can."

"In the dark you will run upon the two braves and be killed."

"I will await the daylight."

"The way will still be dark."

"What have you to offer?"

"I will go with you."

"You can pretend to rescue the maiden and take her to her father, who will pay you the reward. You can have every peso of it. I will ask for nothing but my life."

"You are generous," scornfully.

"Will you not agree?"

"No! I want your life for my revenge. I want your body to sell to Senor Samos, as per his reward offered, and I want the young lady to get my reward for her return to the senor."

"See?"

"You cannot get the girl unless I aid you."

"I will try to, at least."

"You will fail."

"If I do I will have my revenge and the reward for your dead body. See?"

Fuentes did see, to his great horror.

But he would not give up without another trial.

"See here, Marlo; let me tell you that, though I was going to the old mission, I do not believe the senorita is there."

"Your reasons?"

"Well, my braves never fail me, and yet they did not meet me, as I ordered, with their prisoner."

"Do you think they could have seen the reward and have taken her to her father?"

Marco seemed really alarmed at the thought.

"Bah! they cannot read, hardly speak a dozen words of English."

"She may have bribed them."

"I do not believe they could be bribed."

"Well, I shall go to the old mission and find out."

"Let me tell you something else."

"All right."

"When I left the old mission there was a vessel coming down the coast."

"That is nothing surprising."

"This was a steamer."

"Ah! but away off at sea."

"On the contrary."

"Close in?"

"Yes, and running along the coast."

"How far off?"

"Just beyond the breakers, and following the curve."

"Yes."

"She was an armed vessel."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, the cutter Rush."

Marlo turned livid in the moonlight as Fuentes saw.

"She is commanded, you know, by Captain Yerger, a man whom it is hard to escape from, as you know."

"Yes, I know, but what of that?"

"He may know that you were not put to death, and be on your track."

"See here, Fuentes, that man does not live who knows I am not dead, save the one appointed to put me to death and yourself," said Marlo with vehemence.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VAIN APPEAL.

The decided manner of Marlo convinced Fuentes that he was certain as to the fact that his being alive was known to

no one save the man who had been appointed to put him to death and himself.

But he said:

"Some deep reason has brought Captain Yerger to this coast."

"I think I can fathom it."

"Well, let me know."

"You remember that he accompanied the young coaster, Ralph Rollo, my bitter foe, to this coast in the Sea Pearl?"

"Yes, and to the hacienda."

"True, and while Ralph Rollo went to the Haunted Hacienda with his men to await my return the captain of the cutter, with several of the coasters, went to the Hacienda Samos, thinking I might return by that way."

"I understand."

"He then met the Senorita Lulita, was the guest of Senor Samos until Ralph Rollo and his men, having captured me, while you escaped, came after him."

"Well?"

"The captain simply did what all other men do who see the maiden, fell in love with her."

"Ah! you read well, Marlo."

"And he has heard of her capture by you, so has run down the coast to see if he can rescue her."

"I believe you are right."

"If so, he has either marched inland to her father's ranch, or has stormed your old mission and released her."

"I half think so, now you put it as you do."

"So I will go on to the old ruin, see if it is occupied or deserted, and find out if the cutter is still on the coast."

"That would be the best thing for us to do."

"For us to do?"

"Yes."

"Poor man."

"What do you mean?"

"You delude yourself with a false hope if you believe you can make any terms with me."

"Do you know I have gold hidden away, and jewels, the result of my robberies?"

"I do not believe you have other valuable than what you carry with you."

"But I have."

"I'll risk the loss of them by killing you."

"What?"

"I shall kill you!"

"After our long and friendly conversation together?"

"That reminds me that I have been wasting valuable time, so I will carry out my intention."

"What is that?"

"To kill you."

"You do not mean it?"

"I vow I do."

"You would shoot me in cold blood?"

"No."

"I knew that you would not."

"No, a shot would be heard, perhaps, so I will knife you," was the cool reply.

"I do not believe it."

"Why not?"

"I am at your mercy, and even I would not be guilty of an act such as you assert you will do."

"I am more wicked than you are, more cruel, more merciless, and that is saying a very great deal, Senor Marco Fuentes."

"I admit it but for the love of God, Marlo, do not carry out your threat, and I will be your veriest slave."

"You would kill me the first time my back was turned to you."

"No! no! indeed I would not."

"I know that you will, and I will take no chances."

"I have risked life many times, and three times have been set down as surely dead by my foes."

"But I am alive, I hold a winning hand, the gaining of gold, through those rewards offered by Senor Samos is in my grasp, and I shall kill you and get what I deem my due for all that I have suffered, while I certainly shall feel joyous of heart over my revenge."

There was a certain cold tone in the

man's voice, a glitter of the eyes, an expression upon the face in general that convinced Fuentes that his foe meant just what he said.

But what could he say or do to stay his hand.

He knew that he would do the same were their situations reversed, and Marlo was in his power.

He had tried to bribe Marlo with money he did not possess, for little hidden treasure had he, a few trinkets and some gold, put away in the Haunted Hacienda.

With him he had all of his portable fortune nearly, a large belt of gold, a few gems, and some jewelry of more or less value, gotten in his robberies of stage-coach passengers.

So as a dernier ressort he said:

"Marlo, for once in your life, believe me, trust me, and spare my life."

"I will tell you frankly that I have enough of value with me to equal the reward offered by Senor Samos for my life."

"Take this and let me go, and I ask no more."

He paused, and remembering that he could go to the Haunted Hacienda and secure the little treasure he had there, amounting to a thousand dollars, perhaps, and that he could get arms, ammunition, and a couple of good horses there from the corral, and hide in the rock chamber, to which the tunnel led, he continued:

"I will give up all, my riches, my weapons, my horse, and go away on foot, as poor as you now are, only spare my life."

"Come, take what I have and spare me."

"I will take that and your life, too, for your dead body will bring me ten thousand dollars," was the complacent reply.

CHAPTER XV.

CHEATED.

At the words of Marlo, Fuentes gave a groan.

His last appeal had been in vain.

He knew not what else to say.

He could do nothing more, and so lay helpless, bound, at the mercy of his foe.

The moonlight streamed down upon the two men.

One had a piteous expression upon his livid face, the other had the look of a fiend.

Thus several minutes passed away, Marlo enjoying the anguish suffered by his victim.

At last another idea of escape flashed upon the vision of Fuentes.

"Marlo, good Marlo."

"I am not good, but bad," was the sullen response.

"Well, Marlo, let me ask one thing of you?"

"What is it?"

"It is that you will take me alive to Senor Samos."

"What?"

"Take me alive to the senor."

"Would you dare face that man alive?"

"I would rather do so than face you."

"I will not."

"You will get your reward."

"No."

"Yes, for it says dead or alive."

"True."

"Then why would you not get it?"

"Because you would not let me have it."

"I?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand."

Marlo laughed.

"Pray explain."

"You see, it would be so easy for you to say:

"Senor Samos, I come to you alive, but this man who brings me is dead—he is Marlo."

"But I would not betray you."

"Ah, yes you would, and I will not trust you."

"Alive you will, dead you cannot."

"See?"

Again a groan broke from the lips of

the man who now felt that he was doomed.

"Well, Fuentes, I will tell you what I will do."

"What is that?" was the eager question.

"I will leave you here while I go and reconnoiter the old mission."

"You will?"

"Yes, but I'll see to it that you do not escape."

"I cannot."

"I'll also make sure to silence your voice, so that if any one rode by you could not call."

"You will gag me?"

"Yes, and borrow your wig, beard, hat, coat, and horse."

"I guess I will pass muster then, should I meet one of your braves."

"Come, let me make sure of you."

He rolled the bound man up against a tree, and, taking the lariat from the saddle, made him the more secure by binding him beyond all chance of escape.

Then he gagged him with the corner of his serape, and putting on his hat and cloak, mounted his horse and rode boldly along the trail toward the old mission.

After a ride of half a league it loomed up before him, grand, weird, gloomy in the moonlight and silent as the grave.

His horse went at once to the clinging vines and tried to enter.

"Ah! I have found out a secret, but I dare not enter in the dark."

"I will go on foot."

So saying, he dismounted and pushed through the vines.

But all was darkness within, and he dared not venture. He made his way across the plaza and up the stone steps to the crumbling roof of one wing.

From here he looked over the sea. Afar up the coast he saw the glimmer of lights.

"The cutter is there, so in that Fuentes told the truth," he said.

He went from place to place, saw where the chapel was, and knew that it was there that he had seen the two forms at the window, overlooking the sea.

"The place is deserted, but I will not push my search by night."

"Well, I'll come back another time."

With this he returned to his horse, and mounting, rode back along the ridge.

He felt disappointed at not finding the senorita, but determined to make a more thorough search by day.

Now he would make sure of his reward for the body of the Outlaw Ranchero, and see if he could not get the Senor Samos to double his offer for the restoration of his daughter, if she had not already been rescued by the captain of the cutter, which he feared was the case.

So he rode slowly back toward the spot where he had left his prisoner.

As he went along it suddenly struck him that he had made a mistake in leaving him there.

"I was a fool to risk it," he said.

He became exceedingly anxious, and dashed up to the tree to which he had bound the man, fully expecting to see him gone.

But no, the prisoner was there, with his back against the tree, the gag still in his mouth.

There was no movement as Marlo came up, and the head had dropped over as though he was asleep.

"Ho, Fuentes, I am back again."

"Awake and say your prayers, for your time has come to die."

"I have come to kill you," cried Marlo.

The moonlight fell full upon the bound form, and yet no movement came at the man's words.

Suddenly, as he came nearer he bent quickly and started back with a cry like a man in terror.

"Great God! His hair has turned white as snow!"

He put his hands on the gag and removed it from the mouth. Still no movement.

Then he held the face upward and glanced into it.

The eyes met his with a vacant stare. "Heaven has defrauded me out of my revenge!"

"He is dead! He has died of fright," came savagely from the lips of the man thus cheated of vengeance.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PAYMENT.

The scene is the same, but hours after the return of Marlo, to find the man whom he had intended to kill, dead.

Marlo is upon the scene, but not alone; others are with him—one an officer in uniform; the other a man of dignified bearing and in ranchero dress.

It is Senor Samos. There are others also, cowboys from the Samos Hacienda. All had come upon the scene, led by Marlo. The outlaw had ventured to the hacienda. There he had found Captain Edward Yerger, the rescuer of Lulita.

He had told his story, of how he had, as a foe of Fuentes, seeing the reward offered for him, sought and killed him.

The doubt in the mind of the Senor Samos had been dispelled by the words: "Go with me to the spot where I have hidden his body, and see if it is not the Senor Fuentes. This is his horse I ride, as the senorita can declare. Will you come?"

The ranchero at once assented, and the handsome sailor captain accompanied him.

Cowboys went along for fear of a trap. Reaching the scene, Marlo disappeared among the rocks, to soon return with the body.

"Here is the body."

"Is there any doubt now?"

He spoke in broken English, and in a voice so changed that no one recognized him as Marlo. To them Marlo the Merciless was dead.

"The gentleman will pay me my reward?"

"Yes," said Senor Samos shortly.

"Then you shall have the body."

"I do not wish it, man," said the ranchero.

"Yes, senor, take it with you to your ranch and bury it. I will not let any chance escape to be sure of the man's death," Captain Yerger urged.

"Then I will take the body, as Captain Yerger deems it best. Here is the draft you were so urgent to have me write and bring along with me, and it is made payable as you requested, so that you can get the money on presenting it at my bankers."

"Our compact thus ends."

"It does, and I thank you for your kindness, and only regret that the captain there cut me out of the reward offered for your daughter's return to you, but I guess he'll claim the body instead of your gold."

There was a sudden whack, and the outlaw dropped to the ground as though shot, felled by a blow of the sailor straight from the shoulder.

"Insolent dog, how dare you speak the name of one you are unworthy to look upon?" were the words of Captain Yerger, while in an instant he turned to the ranchero and said:

"Pardon, Senor Samos, but the man went beyond bounds; but I should have controlled my temper. Begone, and quickly!"

The last words were addressed to the outlaw, who arose to his feet with a malignant look upon his face that was as wicked as a hyena's driven from its prey.

"Yes, I'll go my way, and you'll go yours; but big as this world is, my fine captain of the sea, we will meet again, mark my words on that."

"Be careful that it is not on my own deck, when I am giving the order to swing you up to the yardarm," was the retort, and Captain Yerger turned away with the Senor Samos, while they were followed by the cowboys, who had strapped the body of the dead Fuentes behind one of them.

The outlaw stood watching them as they rode away. His eyes burned savagely, and he shook his fist at the retreating sailor captain.

"Ah! but would you not give much to know that you have struck a dead man? Yes, for Marlo is dead, and you have struck him."

"But here is my balm," and he held up the draft for the gold.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRICE OF A LIFE.

Marlo watched the receding Senor Samos and his party until they disappeared from sight.

Then he went to the brook near, bathed his forehead, where it had been cut by the severe blow of Captain Yerger, and then lay down upon his blanket to sleep, for very weary now he was.

After a night of uneasy sleep he greeted the morn with joy, ate heartily from the food he had obtained at the Samos ranch, where his haversack had been refilled, and then begun to see just how he stood with the world.

"Here are the weapons of Fuentes, and I will be able to protect myself with them. His cloak, two serapes, his saddle, bridle, lariat, and horse."

"Now to his belt of gold, and the valuables I took from the body. Yes, here is a belt heavy with gold. And here is paper money; and these gems—a dozen in number, are worth considerable; and the jewelry!"

"Yes, quite a fortune I have spread out on this serape before me, and to all must be added my draft on San Francisco."

"Well, that collected, I am to live an honest life and enjoy what I have."

"Yes, that I must do, though I did intend to remain here, kidnap the Senorita Lulita, force her to wed me, and thus secure her gold. But Fuentes lost his life trying to do just that thing, so I will go on a different tack."

"I will secure my fortune, then kidnap Pearl Kenton, the Coaster Chief's daughter, and make her my child wife."

"Now, what shall I do first?"

He pondered a long while before he came to a decision. Then he set to work saddling his horse, and mounting, he rode away upon a trail that would lead him toward a small seaport far down the coast.

It was all of a week before he reached this port, and he went into the little place like a beggar on horseback.

A craft had just put in in search of a crew.

Selling his horse, he shipped, and, two weeks after, was ashore in San Francisco.

He went to a clothing store, fitted himself up, and with a trunk holding his belongings sent for a hack and was driven to a hotel.

He was soon in the hands of a barber, and came forth in a more presentable appearance.

Then he sought the bankers of the Senor Samos, and asked for his money.

"Who will identify you, sir? This is a large sum to pay."

"It is payable to my name, or bearer, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you Mr. Ferdinand Jasson?"

"I am, sir."

"You must be identified."

The outlaw left the bank with the smiling remark that it would be an easy matter to find some one.

He proceeded to the clothing store where he had purchased his outfit.

"You know me, sir, do you not?"

"You told me your name was Jasson, sir."

"Yes, Ferdinand Jasson."

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I have a draft for a large sum on the bank, and I have to be identified as Ferdinand Jasson."

"It is important for me to leave town soon, so for the trouble I give you for going to the bank with me, please accept this," and a hundred dollars was

slipped into the hands of the clothier.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Jasson. Of course I can identify you as one of my customers. I will go with you at once."

This the clothing merchant did, and the money was paid over to the outlaw, with a regret from the polite paying teller that he had caused "Mr. Jasson" any inconvenience by the delay.

"Mr. Jasson" felt like a cattle king, and looked about to see how he could best enjoy himself.

His first walk was along the wharves to see the shipping.

In this stroll he suddenly came upon a very pretty craft, a schooner yacht of some forty tons burden, which had this placard upon the pennant:

"FOR SALE

AT

A GREAT BARGAIN.

Completely furnished and equipped.

A stanch sea boat and fleet sailer.

No reasonable offer refused."

At that time "Mr. Jasson" had no use for a yacht, yet he at once decided to buy the craft.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNFORGOTTEN FACE.

"Who has this craft for sale?" the outlaw asked of a sailor near the little vessel.

"The master is aboard, sir."

"Do you know the vessel?"

"Yes, sir, I sailed in her from New Orleans."

"Ah! she came from the East, then?"

"Yes, sir, she was the crack craft in the Gulf City Yacht Club, and was purchased for a pleasure cruise to Cuba."

"She went from there to Rio Janeiro, then to Valparaiso. From there up we touched at Callao, then cruised along the coast to San Diego, sir, when her owner was tired of cruising and sent her on here to be sold."

"The master and two of us sailors brought her here, and we are anxious to sell out. Come aboard, sir, and see the skipper."

This the outlaw did, and the sailing master, an honest-faced blunt old sailor, corroborated what the seaman had said.

"She cost ten thousand, sir, to build, fit out, and furnish, for she has two suits of sails, spars and all, and a little steam launch, as you see, with a good-sized yawl and gig."

"She is complete, sir, bedding, crockery, and all, from forecabin to rudder post, keel to truck."

"And is she stanch?"

"She'll carry full sail when big schooners have to single reef. Why, we rounded the Horn in her when everything was green about us, and I layed to for only thirty-six hours."

"Then, too, she'll slip away from anything I ever tackled for a brush."

"And your price?"

"Five thousand cash."

"I'll give you half the sum."

"Before I take a dollar less I am ordered to run the yacht back to the Eastern coast."

"What is her name?"

"The Sea Scamp."

"I will take her."

"You mean it, sir?"

"Here is your money, so make out your bill of sale."

"Do you wish a sailing master for her?"

"No, I am a sailor myself."

"I can recommend my two seamen, sir."

"Don't want them."

"You know best, sir."

"I will come aboard this afternoon with my luggage."

"She will be ready for you, sir."

So the Sea Scamp was purchased by a real scamp, afloat and ashore.

Marlo drove down to the wharf that

afternoon and took up his quarters aboard, sending the sailing master and his seamen ashore.

He made himself at home in his beautiful cabin, and after a while, locking up securely, he started out for dinner at the hotel.

As he walked up the street a gentleman in the uniform of a naval officer passed him, then hesitated, turned, and said:

"Pardon me, but am I so remiss as to forget one whose face is most familiar to me?"

"I do not recall ever meeting you before, sir."

"Then I beg pardon, but your face is strikingly like some one I have known."

"The wonder is, sir, that with so many of the human kind there are not thousands who are counterparts of each other."

"I agree with you, sir, and I again beg pardon."

"Granted, sir," and the officer was gone.

But he had not gone far when he came to a halt and turned quickly.

The outlaw was not in sight.

"Now I know that face," said Captain Yerger, for he was the officer.

"Yes, in spite of his being greatly changed from having passed through the barber's hands, and dressing in the height of fashion, with gold spectacles and a blonde wig—for I am sure it was a wig—that is the man who killed Fuentes and received from the Senor Samos his reward."

"I am so sure of it that I will go to the bank and see if the fellow has drawn the money."

He walked rapidly to the bank, and being acquainted with the paying teller, said:

"Mr. Woods, I saw my friend, Senor Samos, of the Clover Coast, who banks with you, give a man a large draft on you a short while since for a service rendered. May I ask if the money has been drawn?"

"Was it payable to Ferdinand Jasson, Captain Yerger?"

"It was, for that is the name he gave."

"He drew it this morning, sir."

"Was he identified?"

"Yes, by Sackhold of the firm of Sackhold and Company."

"I thank you, Mr. Woods."

Then the captain made his way to the clothing store of Sackhold & Co.

Mr. Sackhold came forward most graciously to greet the officer, as a possible customer.

"Mr. Sackhold, you identified a Mr. Ferdinand Jasson at the bank to-day?"

"Yes, sir," and Mr. Sackhold turned pale.

"May I ask you who and what he is?"

"A cattle man, sir, from down the coast, who has traded with me."

"Ah! do you know where he lives?"

"Well, no, sir."

"If he comes in again, sir, pray find his address for me, and, as an officer, I tell you not to let him know that I want it."

"By no means, Captain Yerger," and Mr. Sackhold felt very uneasy.

"The man is a mystery that must be fathomed, for his face haunts me," said the captain, as he strolled toward his vessel.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TURN OF A CARD.

Marlo felt that he had made a very narrow escape when he left Captain Yerger.

"That captain is a dangerous man; he has too good a memory and sharp eyes. He felt that he had met me before. Was it Marlo the Outlaw who killed Fuentes and got his reward, or Marlo, the dead Cowboy Coaster, that he recognized?"

"Of course if he recognized the one, he might even bring his memory down to recognize the Marlo supposed to be in his grave."

"I must avoid him; in fact, I think I had better take a run eastward for a few months, leaving some one in charge of my yacht."

"But I must, after dinner, go to the Gambler's Goal and try my luck at cards. That is what I am here for."

Two hours after, having enjoyed a good dinner, the man of double identity went to the saloon known as the Gambler's Goal.

It was a fashionable resort, and many were playing there when he entered.

He was a perfect stranger to all, but looked about for some one to play with.

"I would like to find a partner," he said to the dealer, after playing faro awhile, and then roulette with success, for he won on all the lays.

"Allow me, sir, as a passing acquaintance to-day, to offer myself," said a voice behind him.

The outlaw started, but was cool when he faced the speaker.

Having asked for a partner he could not refuse, so said:

"Certainly, sir."

"My name is Jasson, and I am a miner."

"Ah, I am glad to meet you, Mr. Jasson. Permit me to introduce myself as Edgar Yerger, captain in the Revenue Service."

The outlaw bowed low.

"Shall we make it a game of cards, sir, between us?"

"Yes, for I dislike a crowd."

"As I do," and Captain Yerger called for the cards and a table.

He was shown a table, cards were supplied, and the game was begun, the outlaw putting up a hundred dollars to be played for, and which was promptly met by the captain.

"You win, sir," said the captain quietly.

"Yes, I play all games to win, Captain Yerger."

"And never lose?"

"And seldom lose."

"What do you name for the next stake?"

"Let us double it."

"As you please."

The outlaw again won, and the captain showed only interest as he said:

"Let us double the stake again, Mr. Jasson."

"With pleasure, sir."

This was done and the officer won.

Again and again he won, until the outlaw became visibly nervous.

"Don't lose your head, Mr. Jasson, for luck may go your way again in time."

The outlaw bit his lips, while one or two gentlemen standing near watching the game said:

"I say, Ray, what is the matter with the captain to-night?"

"How do you mean, Boyd?"

"Well, I never before knew that he gambled."

"Nor did I, though he is a great player for an amateur, and luck always goes his way."

"Yes, and he is a big winner to-night."

"He is, indeed."

"Who is he playing with?"

"Don't know; but the captain is playing another game than cards with that fellow, for you know he asked us to go the rounds of the gambling halls with him to-night, but not appear to know him."

"Yes; but see how he wins!"

"Let us draw near the table, for it is becoming interesting."

"And the captain's man is growing nervous as he is getting worsted."

"He appears to be—what! the captain won three thousand on that hand."

The two officers now approached the table where Captain Yerger sat, cool and yet attentive to his game, while Marlo was pale and nervous.

"Name your sum on your hand, Mr. Jasson," said the captain.

The outlaw drew from his pocket a roll of bills and hastily ran them over.

"There are ten thousand in this roll,

Captain Yerger, and, win or lose, this is my last game of cards."

"To-night?"

"At any time."

"You know best, sir."

The captain placed on the table some eight thousand dollars he had won from the outlaw, and then said:

"I must ask if you will take my I. O. U. for the balance, Mr. Jasson?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

The note for two thousand was hastily written and thrown with the captain's put-up.

All now regarded the game with wondrous interest, for it was seldom so much was put up on the turn of a card.

"I am the winner, Mr. Jasson," said Captain Yerger calmly.

"Yes, and you have won from me nearly twenty thousand dollars, sir."

"I trust you are not inconvenienced, Mr. Jasson, for if so, let me offer you a loan."

"I am not broke, sir. Good-night."

"Let me offer you a chance to redeem your fortune some other night, Mr. Jasson."

"So be it, sir; to-morrow night at twelve I will be here."

"I will be on hand, sir," and Captain Yerger smiled.

As the naval officer walked back to his vessel with his two brother officers, Captain Yerger said:

"I was going to shadow that man to-night, gentlemen, but, as he has made an appointment for to-morrow night, there is no need of it."

"I believed him a poor vagabond, but I saw twenty thousand dollars given him some weeks since, and yet he lost that sum to-night, and will play again, he said."

"What I won from him I place to the credit, to-morrow, of Senor Samos."

CHAPTER XX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

When Marlo left the game he was mad clean through.

"Accursed fool that I am! I have lost my fortune on the turn of a card. If I had not purchased that yacht that money would have gone, too."

"As it was, what I have in my belt I would have staked, only I could not have produced it without undressing."

"And what is in the belt? A petty three thousand is every dollar I possess in the world!"

"Fool! fool! I deserve all my ill fortune for playing against that man."

"I had hoped for revenge in winning his money, until I could gain a better revenge in another way."

"And yet he worsted me in spite of all my skill, and his keen eyes watched me too closely for me to cheat."

"Twenty thousand dollars!"

"Every dollar I got from Senor Samos!"

"And the yacht and what I have left was the fortune I inherited from Fuentes, whom I killed."

"That man Yerger has a suspicion of me. Yes, I believe he knows me as the man who killed Fuentes, got the money, and whom he struck that blow; but he has not yet seen far enough down into the grave to recognize Merciless Marlo!"

"No, not yet; but he will, if I give him the chance. That chance he shall never have, for when he is awaiting me to-morrow night, I will be sailing out of port. Too dangerous to stay here."

"Let me see; I will run down to Point Desolation, kidnap Pearl Kenton, then sail for the secret basin near the old mission, and kidnap Senorita Samos, for her father will pay big ransom money, and money is just what I am after."

"Then I can look about for other spoils, for now I shall know only mercy to myself. Ah! I know that man, Indian though he is!"

"It is Tonka, the sub chief of the Red-skin Ropers, as I live. How lucky!"

"Ho, Tonka! How?"

He walked up as he spoke to an Indian who stood under a lamppost dressed in the full picturesque costume of the Red-skin Ropers.

The Indian turned quickly at hearing his name spoken, and gazed with a somewhat startled look at the other.

"How? Who you?" he demanded in a suspicious manner.

"I am one who has been on many a trail with you, Chief Tonka—the friend of the Redskin Ropers, though the foe of their white chief, Fuentes."

"Where Chief Fuentes?"

"He sought to betray you by having a big ship come to the old mission and capture you all."

"He wanted to save his own life by sacrificing you all, and he would have killed you as he sought to have me slain by my people."

"But, I was on the big ship, and when Fuentes had killed two of your braves and was going to have you all taken in the old mission I told the sailors that an evil spirit lived in the ruin, and that they would never have good fortune if they went there."

"So I saved you all, and Fuentes was killed by the people he led there, for he told them that they should capture the Redskin Ropers and a wagon load of gold."

"Now, Tonka, what are you doing here in the big village of the pale faces?"

"You white chief Marlo?"

"Yes."

"You no die when big seamen take you way?"

"No."

"Fuentes bad man?"

"Very bad."

"Want to kill Redskin Ropers?"

"Yes."

"You save us?"

"Yes."

"Fuentes dead?"

"Yes."

"The get you want?"

"Yes, you just what I want, if you board my vessel with me."

"Then come."

The Indian followed the outlaw on board the yacht, though not without some misgivings.

The lamp was lighted, some liquor set upon the table, and then Merciless Marlo said:

"This is my ship, and I am going to sail to the old mission to-morrow night."

"I am going to have my home there, and I wish you and your braves as my friends. See!"

"I have here a present for you, and for all. How many have you with you?"

"Me fifteen."

"Where are the rest?"

"Cowboy kill them at Haunted Ranch."

"I see, and what brought you here?"

"Drive cattle here to sell."

"You stole the cattle?"

"Yes."

"From the Haunted Hacienda?"

"Yes, and Cowboy Carl kill some braves."

"That was bad; but have you sold your cattle?"

"No, pale face chief say we stole them, so lock my braves up, and we get punished in the morning. Tonka not in camp then, so not locked up."

"Well, I'll see the Big Chief to-morrow, and will tell him that these were my cattle, that I sent you here to sell them, intending to meet you here."

"This will get you free, and you can go at once for the old mission."

"That heap good," and Tonka looked delighted.

"Now, you stay aboard my yacht with me to-night, and I'll go to the Public Court in the morning and get your braves out, and start them down the coast."

"How many cattle have you?"

"One hundred steer, twenty pony."

"Some two thousand dollars they will bring, and I'll get it for you; but you must serve me well."

"Me be all right; like White Chief Marlo."

"But about your braves?"

"They do as Tonka tell them."

"Good again! So now we'll get some sleep, and when I have your braves out and started you for the old mission, I'll get a crew and sail down the coast to meet you there."

"All right."

The red rascal was ready for any deed or adventure under the leadership of Merciless Marlo.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEA SCAMP SETS SAIL.

The next morning Marlo drove in a carriage with Tonka, the Redskin Roper chief, to the Police Court, and at once investigated the charges against the Indians.

He discovered that the band, emboldened by their service for him in the past, as road agents and raiders, and afterward in serving the Outlaw Ranchero, had decided to do a little "lifting" on their own hook; so had boldly moved upon the ranch least liable to fight them off, and that ranch was the Haunted Hacienda.

They found in Carlos, however, and his four cowboys, very dangerous foes, and though they got off with a few horses and a couple of hundred head of cattle, they left behind them several of their number dead.

Then the Red Ropers had driven, by out of the way trails, their captured cattle and ponies to San Francisco to sell.

Of course they were not foolish enough to tell that they had stolen their stock, but their story was not believed, and they were at once arrested and imprisoned.

Marlo, however, grasped the situation, and put a bold face upon the matter, telling the authorities that the Indians were his own cowboys, whom he had sent there with the cattle to sell.

This at once not only released the Ropers, but got without trouble a purchaser for their stock, thin and in bad condition though it was, while it made the Indians the devoted friends of the outlaw, for they had been greatly surprised and frightened over their introduction into the civilization of city life by being thrown into prison.

Marlo at once sent them on board his new purchase, the Sea Scamp.

"They are coast Indians, and by no means bad sailors, so I can use them both afloat and ashore," the outlaw said to himself, delighted at the chance which had thrown the reds in his way.

Taking them in carriages, he drove at once to the wharf where the yacht lay, and had them conceal themselves below decks, a hint that they might get into further trouble being sufficient to frighten them into keeping out of sight.

That done, Marlo proceeded to lay in his stores, and was by no means niggardly, for he ordered enough to last a small crew for a year's cruise.

These supplies were hurried aboard and stored in the hold.

Then the outlaw set about getting a crew. He did not wish to be seen going out of the harbor with an Indian crew, so shipped four seamen to work the craft out to sea, chartering a small smack to follow and take the sailors back when he should have gained a good offing.

It was just sunset when the crew came on board; the last of the provisions were in the hold, and the Sea Scamp was ready to sail.

The seamen soon had sail up, and the pretty craft went bounding along toward the open sea.

Her course carried her within a short distance of the White Wings, and Captain Yerger stood upon her deck watching her glide swiftly and gracefully along.

"That is an exceedingly handsome craft, and she is for sale. I have noticed her sailing about the bay quite often with parties on board. I have half a mind to purchase her, Mr. Ray," he said to his First Lieutenant.

"She would certainly be a very fine yacht to own, sir," was the reply.

"I will stop at her wharf to-morrow and see what I can purchase her for."

It was too dark to see the faces of her commander and crew, and as the sailing master who had had her in charge had turned an honest penny by taking out sailing parties now and then, her cruising about the harbor was not noticed.

The captain soon after went below, and it was not observed that the yacht stood on out to sea by those on the deck of the cutter.

Once he had gained an offing, the Outlaw Captain suddenly brought the yacht to, and waited for a sloop in her wake to come up.

"Men, I thank you for your services, and here is liberal pay for you," said the outlaw.

"Do you mean we are to leave you now, sir?"

"Yes, for here comes the craft that will take you back."

"But you have no crew, sir; you will be left all alone," urged the man, who had no idea of the presence of the Red-skin Ropers on board in the cabin.

"Oh, I don't mind that in the least."

"You cannot manage the schooner alone, sir."

"Let me tell you that I have a large bet on it that I can; that I can run this craft down to San Diego alone—See!"

The crew saw it as the captain intended they should.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE "BLIND" BAY.

To aid the crew to regard the affair as he did—of being left alone at sea, with all sail set, when a stiff breeze was blowing—the outlaw had paid them most liberally for their day's work, and they believed, as he had stated, that it was a bet.

But they told him it was a risky venture, as, in their opinion, there was going to be a blow.

"All right, my men; that was a part of the wager, that I should take what I got in the run; but I was allowed a crew to run me out, for I would not have been permitted to leave the harbor alone, you see."

"But here is your craft, and I will bid you good-night."

The little sloop had hove to, a boat was sent aboard, and the crew returned in her to the craft, giving a cheer to the lone sailor who was to venture upon such a perilous run!

As he saw that the crew of the sloop intended to see him start, the outlaw decided to do so, and at once let the yacht fall off on her course.

With a cheer again for the venturesome sailor, the sloop started back to the city.

When too far off to be seen, the outlaw called to Tonka, and the braves came on deck willingly, for they had been crowded into the two staterooms of the cabin out of sight.

Having had plenty of experience upon the waters of the Gulf of California, all the reds were handy seamen, so they quickly showed their efficiency, and the Sea Scamp, with its captain and crew of scamps, went flying down the coast on her way to a haven not far from the old mission, which Marlo had discovered when on his solitary tramp as a vagabond sailor. He had tramped along the coast, after his escape from death, and had made the discovery of what might be called a "blind bay"—that is, at high tide there was a bay there, wholly landlocked, and with the narrowest of entrances to it through the cliffs.

A channel ran right across this bay, the bed of a stream flowing from inland, and deep enough to float a craft double the size of the Sea Scamp.

At low tide the water in the bay wholly receded, but the stream kept open the narrow channel.

By the coast to the old mission from that snug secret retreat it was two leagues, but by a short cut around the

head of the inlet overland it was not half the distance.

Then, also, the inlet beneath the cliff upon which the old mission stood could be ascended for half a mile above the ruin, by towing the craft in and out with a boat ahead and lowering the topmasts.

All of which, as we shall see, highly favored the daring scheme which the heartless scoundrel had conceived to make much money and wreak revenge on those he both feared and hated.

Down the coast flew the beautiful craft, but, as it drew toward daylight, Marlo headed far out to sea. He wished to avoid being seen by any one on the coast, while, if pursued, he knew that the cutter would keep close in shore to find him.

When the sun arose the coast was just barely visible, but Marlo stood on his course until he had dropped land out of sight.

Not a sail was visible anywhere, and the outlaw felt particularly relieved when no column of smoke was seen astern to show that the Government cutter was in chase of him.

The Sea Scamp and its ruthless crew, under the masterly guidance of the master scoundrel, had manoeuvred into good position to carry out the fell scheme.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BROKEN PROMISE.

Captain Yerger went to the card rooms with the firm expectation of meeting the man whom he only knew as Ferdinand Jasson.

Something about the man Captain Yerger could not understand.

He was confident that he had met the man before, even prior to meeting him at the Hacienda Samos when he collected the reward for the life of Fuentes, the Outlaw Ranchero.

When the Government agent had known him as Marlo the Smuggler the man had a smooth face and closely cropped hair. At that time he was on the vessel which took him to Point Desolation to die. The captain then was sure that the smuggler was dead; otherwise it would have flashed upon him how it was that he recalled the stranger's face, yet could not place him.

The change in Marlo was great—his dress, his padded form, wig, all to disguise himself most thoroughly, since he knew that he might meet in 'Frisco at any moment one of the coasters, and that, unless thoroughly disguised, he would scarcely hope to escape recognition.

So up to the sporting rooms the captain went, determined to give the man a chance to win back what he had lost, but at the same time he wished to study his face and endeavor to trace his identity.

So Yerger entered the rooms some time previous to the hour appointed.

He saw a number there whom he knew, and who had been surprised at his gambling the night before.

"You won heavily last night, captain," said one.

"Yes, it was a small fortune," another remarked. "I never saw such luck, Yerger."

"It was splendid."

"Never knew you gambled."

"And you are to play to-night."

To these comments the Government officer responded:

"I very seldom stake money on cards; but I knew that fellow as one who had obtained a large sum of money from a friend of mine, which, though paid him in good faith, I have my doubts as to his having come by it as he should. So I won back what he got at that time, and placed it to the credit of my friend."

"And you will play him again?"

"Yes, as it is customary in gambling etiquette to allow one who loses a chance at you again, I will play to-night with him for a few games."

But midnight came and Jasson did not appear. One o'clock, and the man was

not there. "I will wait another hour, for something may have delayed him," decided the captain.

And he waited another hour; then, greatly disappointed, he left the card-room, went on board his vessel, and turned in.

He slept late, and while eating his breakfast read the morning paper brought out to him by the steward, who visited the market every morning for his supplies.

"Ah! what is this?" he said, as his eye fell upon the following heading:

"A Band of Redskin Ropers."

And he read aloud as follows:

"A more picturesque lot of redskins we never beheld than a band who were arrested for selling horses and cattle supposed to have been stolen from the lower ranches."

"They had driven them into the yards, and as they seemed like raiders, they were arrested and placed in the lock-up."

"It seems, however, that the ranchero, Senor Ferdinand Jasson, who had sent them with the cattle, happened to be in town, and he went to the Police Department and explained the situation, so that they were released."

"Mr. Jasson said that the Indians were cowboys upon his ranch, near the old San Miguel Mission, and that he preferred them to white men for looking after cattle."

"Mr. Jasson is here in his yacht, we learn, and is to carry his Redskin Ropers, as he calls them, back home with him by sea, as the cattle and horses were all sold."

"Whew! Mr. Ferdinand Jasson, eh?"

"His ranch near old San Miguel Mission, eh? Well!" and Captain Yerger's face expressed his complete surprise.

"He came here in his yacht. He is to take his Redskin Ropers back on his yacht with him? Interesting news to me, certainly. Mr. Jasson was a pretended vagabond, a poor sailor, when I saw him at Hacienda Samos. He killed Fuentes, that is certain, and came here and got his money, which he lost to me at cards."

"Queer. Yes, more than that. Mr. Jasson will bear watching. A wicked sailor, eh? A man hunter, a ranchero, a gambler, and a yachtsman. Well, well!"

"Mr. Jasson, you and I have met before, but—who are you? Strange that I cannot place the man—Ha! by the Lord Harry, but I have it!"

"That man is Marlo the Cowboy Smuggler, dead or alive!"

"Marlo! I'll bet my commission on that guess. Marlo not dead, but here in the flesh as Mr. Jasson, to consummate some rascally work—of that I feel sure! Oh, I've struck the right wind now, and—the cutter is in commission again!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAPTAIN DETECTIVE.

Captain Yerger hastily finished his breakfast, after it all flashed upon him that the man was Marlo—the dead come to life again—the marauder again afloat, and in command of the Redskin Ropers.

What was the rascal's role?

What villainy was afoot?

The vigilant officer must know. That was his work now!

"I will go ashore and find the fellow," he said.

So ashore he went, and taking a carriage, he drove slowly along the docks, looking for a yacht which might prove to be the one belonging to the outlaw.

"There was a pretty craft lying off here yesterday, sir; but she's been sold, I heard," said the driver, "and she sailed last evening, sir, I heard."

"Ah! what was she?"

"A schooner yacht, sir, that has been some time in port."

"Who bought her?"

"I do not know, sir; but there is one of the sailors I saw on her, for I drove the sailing master down here several times."

The sailor was called, and seeing that he was talking to the commander of the

Government cutter, he was very polite and willing to give all the information he had.

He was the man to whom Marlo had spoken, and who had taken him aboard to see the sailing master.

The latter had left the city the night before for the East, but the sailor told of the sale of the schooner yacht, the price paid, described Marlo, and added that she had sailed the night before.

"What crew did she have?" my man.

"The gentleman went down to a sailor's inn below, sir, and engaged a crew."

"Do you know the inn?"

"Yes, sir, for I was there when he got the men, and I was surprised he did not take me and my mate."

"What are you doing now?"

"Looking for a berth, sir."

"Well, I can give you one with me on board the cutter, if you wish to ship."

"Yes, sir, I would like it."

"All right, my man. You can go with me now and later send your kit on board; but for what you do now for me I will pay you personally."

"Thank you, sir."

"Get up with the driver now, and direct him to the inn."

This the man did, and the captain of the little sloop was soon found, the one who had gone out to take the men off the yacht.

He told how she had been chartered to follow the schooner out to sea to bring back the crew.

"How many men?"

"Five, sir."

"Can you find any of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then do so, and bring them to me."

In half an hour the sloop's skipper returned, accompanied by three of the crew which had taken the yacht out to sea.

The captain held a conversation with them, but saw at once that they did not wish to talk.

"They have been paid to keep silent," he mentally decided; so he said:

"See here, my men; you shall be paid for what information you willingly give. I know you were enjoined to silence, but as you do not wish to be classed as aiders and abettors in an outlaw's escape, let me hear just what you have to say."

Thus urged, the men at once told their story, keeping back nothing.

"Do you mean that no one remained with him?" asked the captain, incredulously.

"Not a soul."

"How do you know?"

"Because we were the only ones he shipped, sir."

"And all left him aboard, alone?"

"Every one of us, sir."

"Did you go into the cabin?"

"No, sir; for we had no business in there."

"And you saw him sail away alone?"

"Yes, sir, all alone, sails set as if for a cruise, too, and he at the wheel."

"You have told me the truth, I believe, but that shrewd rogue had a crew aboard—of that I have not a doubt. I now see still further into his game."

"Here is something to divide among yourselves. Leave your names and addresses with the landlord here in case I should need you."

"Now, driver, go to the Police Court, for I wish to find out where those Redskin Ropers went from there."

And to the Police Court the Government officer was driven.

CHAPTER XXV.

SAD TIDINGS.

Captain Yerger learned that the pretended yachtsman had driven away from the Police Court with the redskins in three carriages.

These hacks were looked up, and the drivers told that they drove the gentleman and his Indians to the wharf off which lay the schooner yacht.

Two of the hacks had then been dismissed, but the third had remained to

await the yacht owner. This hackman had seen the redskins go on board the schooner, and noticed that all of them went down into the cabin.

Then the owner had come ashore, and the man had driven him to a ship chandler's and to several provision stores, where he had made large purchases.

"Drive me to the places where you took him," ordered the captain, now on a hot trail.

This the hackman did, and going the rounds, the officer discovered just what stores and other things Marlo had purchased, and was informed that everything had been at once delivered on board the yacht.

He found the drivers of the trucks that had delivered them, but not one of the men had entered the yacht's cabin, or had seen any one on board.

All of which made it apparent to the captain that the redskins were aboard as a crew, that the yacht was provisioned for a long cruise, and, therefore, that Marlo had some deviltry well planned the officer felt assured.

"The sailors told me that she stood southward after the sloop left her, so she has gone either to Point Desolation or to some haven near the old mission. In either case it means business for me, so I must be off."

Captain Yerger went aboard the cutter, taking his newly shipped man with him; but, as he stepped on deck he was met by his lieutenant, who said:

"Special and important orders came on board, sir, just after you left, and I sent to the club after you."

The captain explained to the lieutenant just what he had been doing, and ordered the cutter to be made ready for sea at once.

Then going into his cabin he read his special orders. His brow darkened as he did so, and he said aloud:

"This is indeed unfortunate, but these orders are imperative and admit of no delay. I must head that craft off in the mouth of the Columbia River, and I have only time to reach there under a full head of steam."

So saying he went on deck to hasten the departure of the cutter, while he said: "Lieutenant Ray, my orders call me northward just as I wished to go southward after that fellow Marlo, but a craft sailed with contraband goods out of the Columbia and I am ordered to catch her and bring her back to port."

"I am sorry, but we must go north, now, and leave the capture of Marlo for another time. I only hope he may not get into any mischief before we can get back and catch him."

"I hope not, sir, indeed," was the answer.

The cutter was soon sailing out of the bay under full pressure, bound north.

It is sufficient to say that the contraband vessel was captured after a long and hot chase, and was sent back into port.

But precious time had been lost, and Captain Yerger, as soon as possible, started on the run down to Point Desolation.

He had learned that the Sea Scamp had not been again seen in port, so haste was the order.

The cutter was put to her best speed, and when in sight of the Point, signals for a pilot to take her into the harbor were made.

A pilot was off the reef as the cutter came opposite the harbor entrance, and her prow was turned landward.

"Well, my man, what news among your people?" asked the captain, as he stood by the pilot at the wheel.

"Well, sir, the saddest of news," was the answer.

"Ah! has anything happened?" asked Captain Yerger, with a sinking heart at dread of hearing evil tidings about those he loved.

"Yes, sir; something has happened, and the poor chief was that crushed by it that he could not come out to bring

the cutter in, when he saw her, but sent me, as Master Ralph was away."

"Ralph away?"

"Yes, sir; he is up at the Range, but comes home to-night, I heard."

"Quick! tell me what has happened."

"Well, sir, the poor little lady, our Pearl of the Sea, is dead."

"Pearl is dead!" gasped the Captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Come, my man; tell me all about it."

"Well, sir, it was up at the Range, sir, in the mountains. She was out riding all alone, and—"

"Was captured?"

"No, sir, she was riding a devil of a horse, and he went with her over a high cliff, sir, and it has cast us all down with grief."

"Poor, poor girl! What a fate has been hers!" and the captain's voice quivered with emotion as he thought of the fate of the beautiful girl.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAY OF HOPE.

Captain Yerger rowed ashore as soon as anchor was dropped, and, as he leaped upon the beach his hand was grasped by the Coaster Chief.

"I could not leave my wife, Captain Yerger, to fetch in your vessel. She is nearly crazed with grief, but awaits to meet you."

"This is awful!" said the officer, and then walked up to the Coaster Chief's cabin.

Mrs. Kenton—for she still was called by that name—greeted him with a wail of grief, and the meeting of brother and sister, so long parted, and united to know so much of grief together, was affecting in the extreme.

"Tell me all about it, for after all, it may not be so bad as you imagine," said the Captain in a hopeful tone.

"So bad as I imagine, Edgar?"

"Yes, sister."

"But the horse went with her over a cliff, down upon the rocks, sixty feet below."

"Could it be worse?"

"Did you find the body?"

"No; for it had rolled into the torrent and was swept away."

"Was there no trace of the body? No clothing, her hat, whip, or anything?"

"Nothing."

"Well, that gives me hope. Now, I do not believe she was killed."

"Oh, Edgar!"

"I must go to the spot and see for myself. I feel sure that she did not perish there."

"What then?"

"That she was kidnapped," was the calm reply.

The sorrowing mother uttered a cry of joy, and clinging to her husband, she cried:

"Oh, my husband, do you hear what Edgar says?"

"Yes; but who could have kidnapped her?"

"We must find that out," said Yerger.

"But she has not a foe in the world."

"She had a foe in Marlo the Smuggler—the most implacable of foes," reminded the officer.

"But Marlo is dead!" exclaimed the Coaster Chief.

"How do you know?"

"He was condemned by the Coasters' Tribunal, and was sentenced to death. His executioner was appointed, and he led him away to his doom."

"What was that doom?"

"That I cannot tell you, or any one."

"Who was his executioner?"

"No one knows."

"Did he kill him?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"But what if he did not kill him?"

"Then we would have every reason to fear him. But why this doubt, when there can be none?"

The captain did not answer this question, but asked:

"Where is Ralph?"

"He also has hope, as you have, and

has gone for the tenth time to the scene of her—her—death."

"When will he return?"

"We are looking for him hourly."

"I could not miss him, then, if I went there?"

"Hardly."

"I will go as soon as you can order me a horse and guide."

"Go with Edgar, my husband, for with a ray of hope I can bear up!" said Mrs. Kenton.

The horses were ordered at once; the two men started and rode rapidly, anxious to reach the range cabin before night, so as to begin the investigation early in the morning.

They had reached a place where there was a trail branching off toward the coast, and just there they beheld Ralph coming.

He was riding at a canter, and the horse showed that he had been ridden hard.

"Why is Ralph coming from that direction, I wonder?" queried the Coaster Chief.

"He may have found some clue."

They waited for the youth to come up. He saw them soon, and waved his hat as he bounded forward.

"Well, Ralph, I am indeed glad to find you," cried Captain Yerger, grasping the hand of the young Coaster.

"And I to see you, sir, for the pleasure was unexpected, and I have something to tell you, and also Father Kenton."

"Have you any clue?" cried both in a breath.

"Yes, I have!" was the decided answer. "I believe that Pearl never went over that cliff—that she is alive!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

RALPH'S REVELATION.

The two men now knew that Ralph had something important to tell, so the Coaster Chief led the way to a spring near by, where they could go into camp.

When they were seated near the spring Ralph said:

"I went to the cliff yesterday to have another look at it, above and below where the horse fell. I noticed up on the cliff two scratches on the rock, toward the cliff's edge, and decided that, had the horse gone over from his own accord these scratches would not have been there."

"Very true, Ralph," said the captain.

"Now, again, had the horse bounded over the cliff, his body would have gone into the torrent, as the space is so narrow at the base, but had he been backed over he would have fallen straight down, just as he did."

"Again, had Pearl fallen from his back in going straight down, she would have struck the rocks, and not the torrent."

"Good reasoning."

"There was not a stain of blood, no threads torn from her habit, no whip, no veil, no hat; so I decided that, though the horse had gone over, Pearl had not."

"Just my belief, Ralph."

"I returned to the cliff and begun to search for a trail. I had been informed of an old peddler who had been to the hamlet, and had then started for the range. I found out that he had bought a horse; so I got on his trail and followed it to the cliff, and back again to the one leading to the coast below here, and found the remains of a temporary camp. On I went, from there the trail being very plain, and now felt sure of some discovery about that peddler. The trail led right for the coast, and when it came to soft ground, I discovered that it was made by one horse and by several men on foot."

"I kept right on to the coast, where, in an inlet, there was the evidence of a boat's prow in the shore, and down the beach I found the body of a horse."

"This begins to look interesting, Ralph."

"It will soon look more so, I think, sir. I made out that the horse was the one I had trailed, and which the supposed peddler had bought. The poor beast's throat

was cut, and about him was rope harness, as though the body had been towed out to sea.

"The towing end of the rope was cut, as with a hatchet, and it looked as if the tide had swept the body into the inlet."

"Just what it did do, Ralph; I'll wager my commission on it. You are on the true track, that is certain."

"My theory," Ralph went on, "is that Pearl was kidnapped by that peddler and taken to the inlet, where a boat was hidden. In that she was borne away—probably to some sailing vessel in the offing."

"Father Kenton, have I your permission to make a confession?" the young man demanded.

"A confession, Ralph?"

"Yes, sir; for I think it will expose a crime, and I only ask your permission to do so to clear myself of wrong."

"You can do so, Ralph."

"It involves the laws of the Coasters, sir—their secret laws."

"All the same, you may make your confession," repeated the old Coaster.

"You remember, Chief, that I appeared as a witness against Marlo?"

"True, your testimony cost him his life."

"I left the tribunal chamber, sir, to be overtaken by a black-robed messenger, and was recalled, for I was one of those chosen to draw lots as executioner, and it fell to me to be the one."

"The sentence passed upon Marlo was to be led to the shore, placed in a boat, and, loaded with chains, was to be rowed out into the inlet and sunk alive in the waters."

"I could not do this, even against my worst foe, and so I told him that he should live."

"Did he know you?"

"Yes, sir; he recognized me by my rowing, and pled for mercy. I yielded, rowed him ashore, and gave him what money I had with me."

"I had hoped that he would lead a different life, after such an escape from death; but, alas! I am now sure that he was the man supposed to be a peddler!"

"It is true, for I can now tell you of that man," cried Captain Yerger, and he made known his story about Marlo.

Then he added:

"Come! there is no time to lose. I must get back to my vessel at once and run down the coast to the old mission."

"You, Ralph, follow with your schooner and a well-armed crew, for you can run in where the cutter can not."

"At the old mission we will begin to track down that devil incarnate—for such he certainly is. Come!"

At full speed they rode back for the coast, now full of hope to rescue Pearl.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

INVADING THE OLD MISSION.

The Sea Scamp held well out at sea until she came off the old mission; then she headed in, against a heavy head wind.

The run was made to reach the inlet, known only to Marlo, just at dawn, when he could see to make his way through the Blind Bay.

Two hours after sunrise the Sea Scamp was at anchor in the little stream, bordered with shady banks and heavy timber, so that the redskin crew camped ashore and were happy.

As soon as possible Marlo intended to act. He was first going to the old mission with Tonka, who knew the secret chambers in the ruin well.

The chief had told the outlaw about their flight from the ruin, and how, in their alarm, they had deserted the old woman, Fuego.

So, that night the two set off for the old mission. They carried lanterns, and, just at midnight, reached the ruin, entering by the vine-sheltered archway on the ridge front.

As the Indian entered he lighted his ship's lantern and said:

"Me show Sea Chief where white squaw stay. Heap good place."

They started up the narrow corridor,

turning into a secret door, opening in the solid wall, and which appeared to be like the stones about it.

This led into the narrow passage between the walls, and from which stone steps led to a small dungeon-like room above, that had been the sleeping room of the old woman, Fuego, when Lulita Samos was a captive there.

Stairs led from this room up to the trap door in the secret chamber over the chapel.

As they reached the room below there was heard a deep moan, which startled both Marlo and the Indian.

Then came a loud shriek, followed by a burst of demoniacal laughter.

Tonka then serenely exclaimed:

"Me know. Old white squaw, Fuego."

"All right; I will call her," and the outlaw called out sternly:

"Ho, Fuego! Stop that infernal racket."

"Who are you?" came the answer.

"Friend of Fuentes; here with the Red-skin Ropers."

"All right! Come up."

The two at once ascended the steps, opening the trap from below, and stepped into the room where Lulita had been imprisoned, but which was now the home of the old woman.

She eyed them keenly and said:

"I have never seen you before, but I know the Indian."

"I was the friend of Fuentes."

"Where is he?"

"Dead."

"Dead? When did he die?"

"The night he left here."

"How did he die?"

"The cowboys of Senor Samos killed him."

"I wish that I had his murderers within reach of my knife, for I would avenge him."

"He was good to me."

"Well, I have come to take his place, and to look after you. I have a fine vessel near and plenty of stores. The Indians are my crew afloat and my rangers ashore. I design to kidnap a fair maiden and bring her here for you to take charge of. Then I will kidnap the Senorita Lulita again, and also bring her here."

"You shall be enriched for your care of them; so, good Fuego, to-morrow you can prepare this room for them."

The woman seemed pleased, and said:

"I will care for them, and be ready for their coming. Since the Senor Fuentes left I have dwelt here alone, and those who have come near the place have fled in terror, for I made them believe the ruin was peopled by evil spirits. I heard you, so tried to frighten you off."

"You did startle us, for such yells I never heard before; but, now we will be the evil spirits who are to people the place hereafter."

"To-morrow night at high tide I will bring my craft into the inlet and land stores for you. That done, I go on my cruise after my first captive."

The outlaw and his Indian ally set off on their return to the yacht.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FIRST CAPTIVE.

The yacht ran into the inlet the following night, as Marlo had planned, and charmed old Fuego's heart with the quantities of provisions landed for her use, when the captives should be brought there.

The next night the Sea Scamp set sail up the coast to a retreat not far from Point Desolation. That reached, Marlo at once set out, on foot, to visit the hamlet of the Coasters by night.

He went in the disguise of an old man, with long gray hair and beard, a pack on his back, and a lot of trifling articles to sell, for he was to play the peddler to gain his ends.

He entered the settlement about twilight. Every spot he knew well; every man, woman, and child—for there he had passed his early years.

The children and women soon gathered around him, looking at his wares.

He could have sold all he had, but kept a case hidden, and stated that he had promised to go up to the range, where a number of the people were upon their ranches, for a few weeks, for the cunning scoundrel had quickly found out that the Coaster Chief and his family were not at Point Desolation, but up at the range.

He got shelter for the night at the settlement, and purchased a horse from one of the people to ride on to the range, leaving before dawn.

He had gone but a short distance when he came upon the half dozen Red Ropers who were awaiting his coming, and had gone into camp for the night.

He took them with him to a spot near the range, and then left them to lie in wait while he rode on to the ranch of the Coaster Chief.

He had not gone very far, and was winding around a narrow trail encircling a cliff, when he came face to face with a young girl, mounted upon a spirited horse.

The beast of the outlaw stood still, for the one before him was his intended victim—the one he had come to kidnap!

She was a young girl of apparently sixteen, though in reality she was not so old.

She reined in her spirited horse as she drew near and said:

"You are going the wrong way, sir, with night coming on, for our home lies a mile away upon the range, and we will be glad to bid you welcome."

"I thank you, miss, but I have just come from the ranches in the range, where I have been selling my goods. Let me show them to you."

It was a temptation which no female could resist, and, young as she was, Pearl Kenton yielded.

"Here is a new style of perfume. Try it—there, let me place it on your kerchief, miss, and here."

As he spoke he spilled, as though by accident, a quantity of the perfume upon the bosom of Pearl's riding habit, at the same time saturating the silk handkerchief about her neck, for she had dismounted to look at his wares.

Leaning over the open case, looking at the trinkets, Pearl suddenly reeled and would have fallen had not the outlaw caught her.

"I do not know what ails me—I feel so dizzy—and—oh, sir! help me, for I am—"

She said no more, but sunk down upon the ground, unconscious.

"That perfume did 'ts work! Now to give the idea that her horse went over the cliff with her, and yonder stream, it will be supposed, carried her body away."

"I could not have asked a better place or plan for my work!"

Hastily gathering his wares, he put them across the back of his horse.

As soon as he was ready to start, he took her horse by the bit, put the reins over his head, and then backed him suddenly, forcing him over the cliff.

With an almost human cry the splendid animal tried to save himself when too late. Down he went, sheer seventy feet, upon the rocks below, his crushed form rolling to the edge of the deep mountain torrent, which rushed by at terrific speed.

Then he raised the slender form in his strong arms, and mounting his horse rode back to the trail, which led down toward the coast.

Just after dark he found his Indians, and as he did so Pearl showed signs of returning consciousness, when again the chloroform, scented with perfume, was placed under her nose and she relapsed into unconsciousness once more.

"It is just twenty miles, Tonka, to where our schooner lies. We must get there with all speed and be far out at sea before dawn."

"Once away from here, the girl will ride by herself, for there will be no one to hear her cries, should she call for help. Come!"

CHAPTER XXX.

AGAIN A PRISONER.

Without discovery, the outlaw reached his yacht and put to sea, the horse which

had served him so well in his wicked work being remorselessly slain and towed out into the ocean, where he was set adrift.

The run to the old mission was made in safety, and Pearl found herself a captive there, with old Fuego as her keeper.

Since her restoration to consciousness, on the way to the yacht, the young girl had been perfectly calm, determined to show no fear.

She knew who her captor was. At first it was a great shock to her, for she, with all others, believed that Merciless Marlo was dead.

His first captive thus secure, Marlo set out for the capture of the second.

With ten of his redskins he started a couple of hours before sunset, on foot, for the Hacienda Samos.

He had sent two Indians up the coast with the yacht's yawl, to a point but ten miles from the Hacienda Samos, there to await his coming there.

When near the ranch, he sent his braves to capture the number of horses needed from the corral, and then, in the disguise which had served him so well with Pearl, he made his way, on foot, to the hacienda.

The servant who gave him admission told him that the senor was absent, but would return on the morrow, and that the senorita would be glad to purchase his wares, he felt sure, and also give him lodging for the night.

Just as the servant had said, Lulita bade the supposed peddler welcome, and, after he had eaten his supper, said she would look at his wares.

She bought some trinkets for her nurse, Edwina, and the other servants, paid him liberally for them, and, as he appeared to be a good entertainer, sat out upon the piazza listening to his conversation.

"Ah, senorita, I forgot to show you a new perfume which I have," he said, and going to his case, he brought out the bottle, the contents of which had proven so disastrous to poor Pearl.

It was labeled "Sea Spray Perfume," and the scent completely fascinated Lulita.

It affected her, too, for ere she was aware, she had dropped off to sleep in her chair!

Instantly the man went out to the lodge.

There was the servant who acted as porter, and after giving him a gift or two, he also drew a flask from his pocket and treated him to a drink, with the result that the poor fellow became quickly unconscious.

Returning to the hacienda, the outlaw raised the form of Lulita in his arms, and, five minutes later, was beyond the walls and among his Redskin Kidnappers.

The horses had been obtained and were in waiting further away, and, reaching them, the outlaw mounted, and, bearing the still unconscious Lulita before him, started for the coast, where his boat awaited him.

The fresh air and motion soon restored the maiden to consciousness, and she looked about her in dumb amazement for awhile.

Then she said:

"What does this mean? Where am I?"

"You are simply a captive again, Senorita Lulita, but this time my captive, not Fuentes's."

"Heaven have mercy upon me, for I know that voice. You are Marlo, if the grave can give up its dead."

"The grave has given up its dead, senorita, for I am Marlo."

She tried to escape him now, but he said:

"If you will ride alone, you can do so, or I have a horse for you, and your own saddle, as you see. I mean you no harm. I only want gold, and that I can get from your father."

"Our love-dream is over, and as I need money, I will take you to a place of safety, where I have one other captive to await the payment of what I shall demand."

"I will go with you, offering no resistance, if you only will not touch me."

But, oh! what will not my poor father suffer again!"

"The more he suffers, the more he will be willing to pay for your release."

"What is it, Tonka?"

"Some one is coming along the trail."

"Lariat whoever it is."

The Redskin Kidnappers went ahead, and taking position, whirled their lassoes and caught their victim, while Marlo kept Lulita quiet by saying:

"If you give warning, senorita, I will bind your hands and gag you."

The Redskin Kidnappers found that they had "caught a Tartar," for, before they could secure him, he had shot one and badly injured a couple more of his captors.

He had been on foot, and the bright starlight revealed that he was in uniform.

"Ah! Captain Edgar Yerger! I am indeed happy to meet you," cried Marlo, as he recognized his third victim.

Lulita groaned at sight of the captive, and then Marlo said:

"I have here the senorita a captive to keep you company, and where we are going you will find the fair Pearl of the Sea, the Senorita Kenton."

"Villain! there must come a day of reckoning to you soon. Senorita Samos, you have my deepest sympathy."

"My vessel is off the coast, and I was on my way to your hacienda to warn your father that this merciless scoundrel was not dead. Alas! I was too late, too late!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOGGED TO DEATH.

When Marlo and his captives reached the coast, the horses were turned loose, and the party entered the boat in waiting and was rowed with full speed down to the old mission.

As the cutter was lying almost off the secret retreat where Marlo had hoped to securely hide, the outlaw made for the old mission with all dispatch.

He had heard Captain Yerger say to Lulita that, though he was a captive, and his crew would not suspect it, he had stopped at Point Desolation and had a talk with Ralph, the Coaster, and that youth was to follow the cutter down the coast in the Sea Pearl with a large and well-armed crew, and he would make for the harbor near the old mission.

As he ran into the inlet, far up the coast a white sail was seen, while the cutter, around a point, was not visible at her anchorage.

"We dare not wait for night," decided Marlo; so he ran his boat at once to the yacht, and went ashore to fetch Pearl, old Fuego, and the rest of the Redskin Kidnappers.

An hour later Pearl was ushered into the cabin, where she beheld her uncle, Captain Yerger, in irons, and Senorita Samos also a prisoner.

The meeting between them need not be described, for, though she had never met the Senorita Samos, Pearl had heard her uncle and Ralph talk of her beauty and lovely character.

"The fellow is flying to sea, for he saw a sail coming down the coast and knows now that Ralph is on his track and will dog him to the bitter end."

"So, cheer up, senorita—you and Pearl, for we will soon be rescued!" encouraged Captain Yerger.

Out of the inlet swept the outlaw craft, and as she gained the open sea, the sail so far off a couple of hours before was seen now but two leagues away.

It was the Sea Pearl, and she was coming along under a cloud of canvas.

"Oh! if Ralph will only follow us!" cried Pearl.

"He will, for the crowding of canvas will tell him that this craft is flying from him."

When Marlo saw the Sea Pearl, he knew her at a glance, and smiled as he remarked:

"I have a craft that can run away from her. But crowd on all sail, you red devils!" he cried.

This was done; but, either the Sea Pearl

sailed as well as the Sea Scamp, or she was bringing a better breeze with her, for she held her own.

That Ralph well knew the game he wanted was before him was evident, for he at once started in chase of the Sea Scamp.

"If the cutter was not anchored around the point she could see what was going on and quickly end the chase," said Captain Yerger.

On the two vessels flew, the Sea Pearl holding her own if no more.

"See there! Ralph has invented a sail! Brave boy!" cried Captain Yerger, as he saw other spars run out over the Sea Pearl with canvas on them.

In a heavier wind this could not have been done; but the youth had brought out all extra canvas and spars, and with his skilled and now eager crew, he had managed to set considerable more sail than the Sea Pearl had ever carried before, or might again.

The result was at once apparent, for the Sea Pearl begun to creep up rapidly, and Marlo then knew that she would overhaul him.

"Fire on them, redskins!" he ordered, and the heavy, long-distance rifles of the Redskin Kidnappers began to crack.

"They are preparing to return the fire! Quick! Bring those prisoners on deck, Tonka!" commanded Marlo.

It was done, and just in time, for there was no shot now from the Sea Pearl, though her crew had been ready to fire when Ralph beheld the two maidens and the officer in uniform suddenly brought on deck as a shield to ward off their fire.

"We must take them, men, and fight it out with our knives, for no shot must be fired," cried Ralph, and his Coaster crew answered with a ringing cheer.

Another hour passed, and the Sea Pearl's bowsprit was pointing over the stern rail of the Sea Scamp.

Not a man was visible upon her deck, for canvas rolls, spars, and cabin furniture, with coils of rope, had been made into a breastwork to protect them.

"Now, lay her aboard!" cried Ralph.

With a crash, the two vessels came together, and the young Coaster led his crew upon the deck of the Sea Scamp.

In his hand he carried a sword, and his first act was to cut a revolver from the hand of Marlo, and his next to drive the blade clean through the recreant's heart.

"Your life belongs to me, Merciless Marlo!" cried Ralph as he gave the thrust.

The gallant Coasters swept the reds forward with a rush, then pressed them over the bow into the sea, and the combat was over!

"My God! a woman slain!" cried Ralph, as he beheld the form of Fuego lying upon the deck.

"She took her own life when she saw Marlo fall," said Captain Yerger.

"You, sir, a prisoner too! and the Senorita Lulita?"

"Yes, and you are our deliverer, brave Ralph. But, come! Let us get the two crafts back to a harbor, for I fear a big blow is coming on."

"Shall I command the Sea Scamp with a crew you will let me have?"

"Yes, sir; and soon the two pretty vessels were headed for the shore."

Just after nightfall they ran in under the guns of the cutter, amid the wild hurrahs of the crews.

CONCLUSION.

My romance is ended. Of the characters who have figured in it many are yet alive, for the time of action dates back only to the earlier days upon the California coast.

That Captain Yerger had well won Lulita Samos goes without saying, while Ralph avers that the happiest day of his life was when he made Pearl Kenton his bride, and felt no dread of having her again stolen from him by Merciless Marlo, the Man of Many Lives, and his Redskin Kidnappers.

THE END.

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